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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BY

JILLIAN F. HIGHETT

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the nature of actual and preferred parental involvement in the early childhood education years of kindergarten, reception and year one, as perceived by parents and teachers. A review of the literature showed that although parents have always been involved in the rearing and education of their young children, during the last twenty years renewed emphasis on the value of parental involvement within learning programs, has been encouraged. The literature also indicated that while a great deal has been written about teachers' views with regard to parent involvement, little has been documented on how parents interpret their involvement. During the past ten years South Australian Education authorities have endorsed policies focusing on and encouraging parent involvement within the systems.

A questionnaire was designed and mailed to 276 parents of kindergarten children, 289 parents of reception and year one children, 12 kindergarten teachers and 23 junior primary teachers. Sixty eight percent of kindergarten parents, 63% of reception and year one parents, 83% kindergarten teachers and 74% junior primary teachers responded from within a school district of the South Australian State Education System.

The initial 26 items in the questionnaire were based on possible tasks parents could do in assisting in their child's education. Factor analysis was used to categorize responses to these items into eight factors relating to parent involvement: attending at school, assisting with children, talking with the teacher, home support, assisting teacher, attending learning workshops, helping with resources and friendship with the teacher. Analysis of these factors indicated that although parents perceived they are actually involved in early childhood education, more parent involvement would be preferred by both parents and teachers. More kindergarten parents assisted their children and parents who had experienced post-secondary education, were more involved within the programs. Teachers thought parents were more involved than parents did. The barriers to parental involvement were younger children, work, time, distance from the school and lack of confidence.

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Chapter One

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

For the past two decades, education systems throughout North America and Australia have been placing increased emphasis on parent involvement within schools, especially with regard to early childhood programs. However, the notion of teachers working with parents to better the education of the children is not new. Evidence can be traced back to the sixteenth century when the following statement was recorded in an English school journal.

> Seeing that the school master . . . is not absolute potentate in our commonwealth, to dispose of people's children as he pleases, but only a counsellor to act along with the parent, if the latter is willing to take advice, I should wish, that in order to have this duty accomplished, parents and teachers should not only be acquainted, but on friendly terms with each other (Sharrock, 1970, p. 60).

Since then, the relationship between teachers and parents has changed from one of being uninvolved but on friendly terms, to one where an effective supportive relationship that produces and enhances positive learning situations for the whole child is preferred. Now, when parents and teachers interact on behalf of the child, issues related to the child's physical, mental, social and emotional well-being are customarily considered within the context of the overall learning program. Decker and Decker (1984) stated that "with research showing the significance of the family in a child's total development, enlightened people are increasing pressure for parent involvement in children's programs" (p.128). As a result, teacher and parent relations have become more intertwined and parents are able to participate actively in school or kindergarten management, either at the school or state level.

For the first half of this century, the primary purpose of education in South Australia was to perpetuate the traditional culture of a particular ethnic group and to prepare students for the world of work. Less attention was given to instructional and learning strategies and more emphasis was placed on content and outcomes. Today, teaching strategies include a

variety of techniques and alternative options for imparting knowledge to students. These new approaches to learning put more emphasis on the needs of the students and on how school knowledge can be effectively integrated into the structure of every day living.

Now, the major purposes of learning and education are to stimulate students to be independent, to encourage them to think and problem solve, to teach them to assess their own values, and to encourage them to become a contributing member of society within the community in which they live. These learning goals are sought not only within the classroom, but are acquired through lived experiences in the home which is the child's first school room, and in the community. As a result, kindergartens and schools have had to identify community needs and respond to community norms and values, and this has led to teachers and administrators committing time and resources to facilitate community activities. A factor that is therefore essential in securely establishing these learning goals, is the effective support of the home and community.

The South Australian Education Department decides the policies for all aspects of education within the schools, from reception (pre-grade 1) to matriculation (grade 12). There are no school boards in South Australia; instead the parents and community at large are active participants in the governance of education through their school councils which are required under the Education Act. The mandate of school council members involves three areas; the determination of curriculum objectives, the use of resources and the development of broad organizational policies. These areas were defined by the Director General of Education in South Australia, Mr. J.R.Steinle (1985). This initial commitment to being involved in the planning and organization of certain aspects of the school and its culture, includes the opportunity for parents to extend their involvement to represent the school council at regional level and, ultimately, at state level meetings. Members of a school council are elected from the school community, and hold office for two years. The number of members on school council reflect the size of the school population. For

example, in a primary school (reception to grade seven) of two hundred and fifty pupils, a school council would have eighteen members, three of whom would be school staff.

In South Australia, kindergartens and schools are controlled by separate jurisdictions. The South Australian Education Department is responsible for the school system and the Childrens' Service Organization represents the kindergarten system. Each kindergarten has its own governing committee, comprising of parents who have been elected from those parents with children in kindergarten.

Working in conjunction with the kindergarten director, the local management committee is involved in decisions of purchasing, policy, facility control and finance. Management within the Childrens' Service Organization (CSO) has been regionalized so that parents from local kindergartens can be involved in participating at a regional level and ultimately at a state level. The parent representatives from each kindergarten meet as a group, on a monthly basis with members of the kindergarten staff and a representative from CSO to discuss matters relating to areas such as policy, finance, or regional concerns. Their decisions or recommendations can influence possible changes within the organization at the highest level. They share ideas and learn of the recent developments in early childhood by having guest speakers from specialized professions such as speech or music.

Common concerns of these two educational bodies, namely the school council and kindergarten management committee, are that children have the opportunity to experience quality learning that is both effective and relevant to their development, and that parents have the opportunity to offer some input. The importance of parent encouragement and interest in the child's schooling is a benefit to the child, the school and the parents. Well informed parents, who are involved at some level in the learning process of their children, grow in their ability to measure the effectiveness of educational programs. They respect the views of educators and value their expertise in matters that concern the well being and education of their children. Researchers such as Hunt (1961) have reinforced the fact that emphasis should be placed on the importance of the child's initial learning environment

which clearly suggests the home. Bloom (1964) revealed that the learning potential of pre-school children has not been fully encouraged or extended with regard to their future development and progress at school. Umansky (1983) stated that

> closer contact between parents and teachers will give each a more complete picture of the child's abilities and improve consistency in working toward desired goals. Most importantly, perhaps, the child will identify both the school and the home as places to learn, and teachers as sources of learning (p. 263).

As educational finances decline and patterns of authority become more open, the need to involve the parents in deciding the shared use of available educational resources and facilities has meant increased public interest in education. Parent groups and other taxpayers from within the community, are concerned with the rising costs of education, and the seeming dichotomy between the real world and school life. Decker and Decker (1984) noted that in order to address such concerns, "some federal programs require parent participation as a prerequisite for funding" (p. 128).

Meier (1978) reported that parents who participate in their child's early education program gain a sensitivity to their child's emotional, social and intellectual development and needs. This would indicate that parental interaction within the learning environment creates a feeling of greater enjoyment and a bonding with the child, which in turn provides the child with a purpose to achieve. This renewed awareness of parent involvement has encouraged parents to realize that they have a right and responsibility to be involved in their child's learning process.

At the same time the teaching profession's knowledge of teaching skills and of how children develop and learn has continued to grow. This awareness has resulted in classroom programs that are more responsive to the concerns of parents and of society. Sharrock (1970) identified the importance of parent involvement with the suggestion that "at this point in our educational history, the climate of opinion favours the discussion of new methods of collaboration between teachers and parents and the enlargement of the

parents' place in the life of the school" (p. 11). More recently Builder (1986) defined parent involvement as including

> any school related activities which acknowledge the importance of the role of parents in children's education. These activities must respond to the needs of the school to improve the quality of education and to the needs of parents to understand the school curriculum, policy, or practices for the direct benefit of their own children's learning (p. 19).

Through parent involvement, a teacher is able to plan an adult-child ratio which enriches the opportunity for student adult interaction. For the child, adult attention increases the likelihood for greater achievement, and the reinforcement of a positive self-concept. The parents' talents and interests provide a valuable resource to the child and the program.

Berger (1986) described Head Start as a successful parent involvement program. It was initially introduced in the United States of America in 1965 as an eight week summer program for disadvantaged preschool children. Since then it has been enlarged to encompass varied preschool programs. Although the program is administered by local agencies, the success of the program can be reflected in the fact that it is still funded by federal money. Its main goal is for both parents and teachers together to provide a quality educational program for the child. One reason for the success of this program is that the parents of the children who are participating feel that the program is theirs. Both parents and teachers are involved in planning and directing the learning. The relationship between staff and parents is an open and accepting one in which parents know that their ideas are being considered and consequently put into action.

As a result of this parent/teacher relationship, children see their parents from another perspective, and they become aware that their parents and teachers are interacting for their benefit. Parents can realize the importance of being an instigator in their child's education and that their involvement can help the school maximize educational benefits. Involvement

in the learning program tends to result in a more positive parent /teacher relationship, as parents become familiar with the teacher's commitments and concerns and the varied interruptions that have to be considered within the daily classroom routine.

Much research supports the value of parental participation, but little has been done with regard to the real needs and expectations of the parents as perceived by the parents themselves and by the teachers involved. Sallis (1979) said that parents are continually being told that their support is absolutely vital to their child's success and yet they are given no real role to play in a process in which their involvement would be beneficial and their input unique.

Some foremost authorities on early childhood education (Hymes,1975; Rich, 1978; and Berger, 1986) agreed that when the parent is involved in the child's physical and emotional development, school-home relationships are enhanced. Bloom (1964), an influential psychologist, recognized the potential learning within a child as being on-going from birth. He created an awareness that children need to be exposed to an early, productive and purposeful educational atmosphere. He stressed that teachers and parents need to look critically at the objectives and outcomes that could benefit the child as a result of their interaction.

A great deal has been written about teachers' and administrators' views with regard to parental involvement within the education system. Their perception, according to Cullingford (1985), is that schools are open and accessible to parents. Parent participation in schools is frequently discussed. But how can it be made to happen? Do parents perceive that schools are open and accessible? What do teachers think of parent involvement? How do parents interpret their participation in particular learning activities?

The Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of actual and preferred parental involvement in the early childhood education years, as perceived by parents and teachers. According to the South Australian system, kindergarten, reception and year one are early

childhood education years. In the course of the study the following specific problems were investigated.

Problem 1

To what extent were there differences in parent involvement in early childhood education as perceived by parents?

Sub-problem 1.1 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement in early childhood education programs as perceived by kindergarten, reception and year one parents?

1.2 To what extent were there differences in actual parent involvement of working and at home parents?

1.3 To what extent were there differences in actual parent involvement when pre-kindergarten children are considered?

1.4 To what extent were there differences in actual parent involvement when the education level of parent respondents was considered?

Problem 2

To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by teachers?

Sub-problem 2.1 To what extent are there differences in parent involvement as perceived by kindergarten, reception and year one teachers?

2.2 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by teachers with varying years of experience?

Problem 3

To what extent were there differences between parents and teachers on parent involvement in early childhood education?

Problem 4

What barriers to parent involvement were identified by parents and teachers?

Sub-problem 4.1 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by kindergarten parents?

4.2 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by reception and year one parents?

4.3 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by teachers?

Problem 5

What suggestions to improve parent involvement in early childhood education were identified by parents and teachers?

Sub-problem 5.1 What suggestions to improve parent involvement did parents identify?

5.2 What suggestions to improve parent involvement did teachers identify?

Definition of Terms

Parent: Parent was defined as being an adult caregiver who is involved in the child's schooling. For this study, within any one household, the members were free to choose who would fill out the questionnaire.

Parent involvement: For the purpose of this research, parent involvement referred to a broad range of involvement within the kindergarten and school programs. The involvement covered parental roles ranging from passive interest to active involvement in kindergarten and classroom activities.

Kindergarten: In South Australia, kindergarten caters for children from three years six months to five years of age. These children are eligible, but not compelled, to attend.

Reception: In South Australia, reception is a transitional period where children move from kindergarten to the school setting. This occurs when the teachers and parents are satisfied that the child can cope emotionally, physically, mentally and socially with the transition. Reception is considered to be a compulsory preparatory phase, leading into the more formal learning of year one, and is only for as long as the child needs it to be.

Year one: In South Australia, a child progresses from reception to year one at his/her own rate. Year one is the first compulsory year of schooling and children must commence this formal schooling at six years of age.

Junior primary: In South Australia, junior primary classes range from reception to year three.

Rationale for the Study

In the education of children, emphasis is shifting from a school centered approach to one which includes parents. Educational research has revealed that home factors are a major contributing factor in the development and progress of the child. To elaborate, historically the family accepted the responsibility to provide for the early educational development of their children. Decker and Decker (1984) said that "children learned the essential skills, attitudes and information either in the family or under its supervision" (p.72). Parents have trained, taught, cared for and disciplined their children as part of the child's development. However, this parental involvement in the child's development, has not always been recognized as being educationally worthwhile. Kelly (1973) stated that "whereas in the past, parents have not been regarded as useful contributors to the educational process, more extensive parental involvement in the schools is now increasingly viewed as essential by many educators" (p.357). Hence there is a need for parents to be involved in, or supportive of, the continuing educational process once the child leaves the home setting.

Morrison (1978) said that "parent involvement is a process of actualizing the potential of parents; of helping parents discover their strengths, potentialities and talents and using them for the benefit of themselves and their children" (p. 28). Therefore, teachers need to be aware that interaction with parents through reasoning, sharing and encouragement, rather than through authority, is beneficial to parent, child and teacher rapport. It is important that a teacher be aware of the individual parents' strengths and weaknesses and to reinforce the parents' contributed efforts within the areas that the parent feels most

comfortable. As a result of such interactions with parents, teachers may identify ways to involve parent expertise in the classroom. Parents have opportunities to act as resource people, to help, or to prepare instructional activities. Berger (1986) confirmed this suggestion by saying that "offering a variety of tasks and different degrees of involvement assures parents that they may contribute according to their talents and available time and allows all of them to be comfortable about coming to school and enjoying involvement in the educational process" (p.99).

Stamp (1975) said that education like other social services in a democratic society, is indeed everyone's business. It is especially the business of those parents who have children in schools. In South Australia, the educational trend has continued to move away from self contained classrooms, where one teacher is responsible for the learning experiences of one group of children, to open space learning areas with team teaching and to structures which cater for individual student progression. These changes can ultimately lead to the involvement of parents and para-professionals working within the classroom setting. Teachers now have the opportunity to create one to one learning opportunities for student's individual progression, and for providing them with alternative learning options. The opening up of these once self-contained classrooms offer the potential for teachers to develop close personal relationships with the parents and the opportunity to capitalize on the expertise that the parents and community members have to offer. It is an indication that education has the potential to be everyone's business.

Both parents and teachers have a strong allegiance to the children in their care. The parents have a biological and emotional bond with the child and as a result want the best possible educational alternatives and opportunities for their children. The teacher has a professional commitment to offer the individual child the best possible learning situations to meet the child's needs.

The grades kindergarten, reception and year one were chosen for this study because of the researcher's expertise and interest in the early childhood field. It would seem that at

this stage of a child's education, parents may feel comfortable and willing to be involved in some aspect of a learning program. As a result of this study, differences in the perceptions of parental involvement, by both parents and teachers, will be documented. Datta (1973) suggested that the importance of gaining such information could indicate that the parents' needs and desires will be better known than at present.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study was limited in the extent to which respondents were knowledgeable and willing to give truthful answers, and that their opinions were representative of all parents and teachers concerned with early childhood education in the Yorke Peninsula district of South Australia.

The questionnaire used in this study may not have covered all possible suggested ways of involving parents in kindergarten, reception or year one programs, and may have forced the respondents to choose items which did not perfectly correspond to their perceptions.

Delimitations of this study were that the parents and teachers participating in this research, were from selected towns within an educational region in the state of South Australia. Therefore, generalizations to other communities must be made with care. Since the data were collected in South Australia, the results may not be representative of Canadian schools. Further, three grade levels are involved in the research, kindergarten, reception and year one, and the data were collected at one point in time, November 1987, which is in the last term of the school year.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the purpose of the study of parental involvement in early childhood education by emphasizing the importance and value it has for the well-being of the child, the parent, the teacher and therefore, society at large.

The research problem has been defined as actual and preferred parental involvement in schools, as perceived by parents and teachers. As a result, this study will explore various

aspects of this involvement, in the three early childhood education years, kindergarten, reception and year one.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with an outline of the historical development of parent involvement in early childhood education and recent initiatives in this area. The three areas discussed are: rationales for parent involvement; the value of parent involvement taking into consideration the child, the teacher and the parent; and models of parental involvement. These three areas provide the basis for the conceptual framework of the study.

Historical Development

Throughout history, children have learned by modelling their parents' social, moral and intellectual behavior and survival skills. Frost (1966) stated that "the need to survive and to be accepted are powerful incentives to learning" (p.9). Parents or family groups have always been involved in the rearing and education of their young, to the point that (Frost, 1966; and Berger, 1986) referred to them as being the oldest and most essential part of any education system.

It was during the latter part of the seventeenth century that the modern parent educator began to emerge and the role of the parent was recognized and considered in the learning situation. Aries (1962) made the statement that, for the first time in history, authors and educators were speaking directly to parents. Rousseau in his book Emile, written in 1762, referred to parents with the words,"tender and provident mothers . . . cultivate, water the young plant ere it die; it will one day bear fruit delicious to your taste. Set up a fence betimes round your child's soul, others may mark its circuit, but you must build the barrier" (as cited in Archer, 1964, p. 56).

Pestalozzi (1747-1827) was a parent educator who Berger (1986) proclaimed has been hailed as the "father of parent education." He strongly emphasized the home as being an important aspect with relation to the quality of a child's learning. Pestalozzi (1951) said "as the mother is the first to nourish her child's body, so should she, by God's order, be the first to nourish his mind" (p. 26).

Froebel (1782-1852) recognized the importance of the parent in the development of the child. His initiative and foresight urged him to organize the first kindergarten as a place where the needs of the child could be developed. Part of his curriculum included the "natural unfolding" of the child and this was accomplished with the help and interaction of the parents.

The emphasis on parental influence continued. Then, during the first half of the twentieth century, some child development experts (Fisher, 1933; and Gruenberg, 1940), proclaimed that rearing children was not instinctive and that parents needed some reinforcement and guidance. As a result of this assumption, many varied and sometimes controversial books and magazine articles were published with suggestions about child development and rearing. In popular magazines such as Good Housekeeping and Ladies' Home Journal, many articles reinforcing the importance of providing a good home environment for children were published. As well there were continual new ideas and theories explaining and advising parents of the right way to discipline children. Many of these articles and books were contradictory, and while they were meant to provide parents with information, they may also have contributed to parents' feelings of frustration and of being inadequate and inept in the rearing of their children.

Abagail Eliot was particularly interested in working with parents, as well as their children, and in 1922 she started the Ruggles Street Nursery in Boston. It had a special emphasis on the family as partners in education. Eliot's philosophy was that if parents wanted to participate, they should be prepared to share some responsibilities. This philosophy introduced some structure, commonsense and order into child development theories. Parents were able to share ideas and interact with others on topics of common interest. Taylor (1981) noted that this parent cooperative organization still continues to flourish.

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA), founded in the United States of America in 1897 as a parent body within the education system, was initially concerned with matters

pertaining to children affairs, the passing of child labor laws and monitoring general health and welfare issues. However, with frequent interaction and cooperation, parents and teachers realized that they sought a common goal, to strive to provide the best education for the children. In 1915 there were 60,000 PTA members and by 1925 there were 875,000 members. Parent education and involvement became an institutionalized part of the school through the actions of the PTA.

In 1922 Gruenberg introduced more stability, and a feeling of control for a particular group of parents, when he published "Outlines of Child Study: A Manual for Parents and Teachers." This manual included guidelines for issues such as speech development, obedience, discipline, adolescence, and emotional and intellectual development. Each chapter had follow-up discussions for both parents and teachers, with an outline of other references for further reading. Parents who were educated, confident and self assured had the opportunity to contribute to child rearing theories and practices, and the opportunity to be able to interpret them for their personal situations.

Throughout America, the development and expansion of new parent organizations led to the formation of the National Council of Parent Education in 1925. This, along with ventures such as child development studies and parent education training programs,were funded from either state or federal sources. Colleges and universities in the United States received money from the Memorial and Spelman Fund for research, teaching, and dissemination of findings from their child study centers. Canada established programs at McGill University and the University of Toronto. Basically the goals of the universities and other institutions at this time focused on the following areas. "Research on the development of children, training of professionals for services for and research on children, and dissemination of information and education of parents" (National Society for the Study of Education, 1929).

To assist in the research, nursery schools were established within the universities and institutions so that parent/child interaction could be studied and analyzed. Early childhood

development, and the importance of parent participation, led to the establishment of numerous nursery schools and kindergartens. In 1930 the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection recommended parent education as part of the public school system and in 1934 a journal known as Parent Education was published. To capitalize on this era of exploring the growth and potential of the young child, and to create a purposeful relationship with child and parent, Benjamin Spock wrote The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care (1946), and Children's Bureau published Your Children from 6 to 12 (1949). Other books orientated towards the development of young children and parent relationships included literature written by Erik Erikson Childhood and Society (1950) and, in the same year (1950), Hymes published Effective Home School Relations.

This was also a time when a new emphasis was placed on the intellectual development of children. In 1952, Piaget's work The Origins of Intelligence in Children was translated into English. When Hunt (1962) published Intelligence and Experience, the content of this book aroused topical areas for debate and discussion, as it queried the concept of a fixed IQ. In the Manchester Survey (part of The Plowden Report), Wiseman (1967) examined the relationship between environmental variables and school attainment. He concluded that "the most important of our findings . . . is the demonstration that the major forces associated with educational attainment are to be found within the home circumstances of the children" (p. 27). The results indicated that the school contributed 18%, the neighborhood 20%, and the home 62% towards the child's school attainment. It is interesting to note that Wiseman's deduction indicated that parental attitudes towards education had a stronger influence on a childs' achievement than the socio-economic status of the home.

Despite this emphasis on the home and its influence on the intellectual development of the child, between 1950 and 1970 the major responsibility for formally educating children was delegated almost entirely to the school. Teachers felt threatened with parental intrusion and as a result, the educative function of parents declined rapidly. Topping (1986) described this era by saying, "in a way, then, the development of formalized education in

schools served largely to rob parents of a function they had carried out for millennia " (p.1).

Recent initiatives

Suddenly the wheel turned once again and the trend moved toward parental involvement, or as Cullingford (1985) aptly said, parents were rediscovered. During the 1960-70 period, there was a vast output of research material to indicate that the development and standard of childrens' abilities at school are a reflection of the type of relationship they experience with their parents within the home setting. Gordon (1969), Sharrock (1970), Datta (1973), Hunt (1961), and Bloom (1964) produced evidence indicating that from the time of birth a child is developing socially, mentally, physically and emotionally. Bloom's research suggested that a child aged four has developed about 50% of his/her intelligence, as measured at age seventeen. Despite Bloom's findings, Gordon, (1969) reported that in 1967 early childhood educators were severely challenged for using federal funds to "teach mothers to play with their babies." However, educators continued to look more broadly at the task of working with parents, aiming to enhance child development and strengthen the bond of family life. A report from the Australian Schools Commission (1977-79) read:

> Parents have long been excluded from any significant educational role in the school. The immediate problem is to encourage them into the school on terms which convey their right and capacity to participate in framing its educational program and to assist teachers to enter into a new kind of relationship with parents. (p. 6)

Reinforcement came from researchers (Hunt, 1961; Bloom, 1964; Meier, 1978; Berger, 1986) who insisted that parents were already involved as the primary educators of their children even before they went to the playgroup, day care, or kindergarten and that their continued interest was apparent.

Gracanin, a South Australian school principal, indicated that

> the people who have the most effect on the children are the parents. From before birth and thereafter it is their feelings, their home environment, their culture with which the child grows up. So in order to get the best for the child we must work with the parents so that we become team members in facilitating the education of their child. By the age of five, the child has already got a wealth of information and experience. In the past we, as educators, have said to parents, "Thank you very much, you've done your job, now we'll take over," thus denying the concept of continual education provided by the parent. (1979 p. 2)

O'Connor (1986) also stated that if one improves family life for the under fives, there is a very good chance of improving childrens' all round performance later on in life. Hence, family life integrated into the kindergarten and school environment is an important factor in the learning potential of young children. Gracanin (1979) acknowledged this when she stated "our school policy is to give parents, as a right, the opportunity to contribute to their child's education in between home and school". (p. 2)

The United Kingdom research of Tizard, Scholfield and Hewison (1982), demonstrated the benefits of parents listening to their children read. Informed parents listening to their children read each night was shown to be of a greater long term benefit for the child than specialist teaching at school. Investigators such as Hymes (1950) suggested that the way in which children learn to think, use language and interact with others is a result of the way in which the parent interacts with them.

The renewed emphasis on parental involvement in schools is beneficial in two ways. In South Australia, there is a professional development program called the Early Literacy Inservice Course (ELIC). This program has as a Parent/Teacher Communication section which explores the reasons why teachers want to communicate with the parents. Some factors that have emerged show that teachers feel continual communication could lead to a better understanding for parents of ever changing teaching methods, for instance, being

aware of the variety of reading and writing experiences children need and ways of planning and managing the classroom literacy program so it could be implemented in the home environment. ELIC (1987) stated that "we, teachers, feel we need to re-examine our relationships with parents, and . . . the kind of relationship towards which we are working" (p. 7).

Cullingford (1985) wrote that apart from politicians, teachers are the next most attacked people. He said, "there is a widespread instinctive belief, quite apart from a mass of evidence, that teachers do have an impact on the ills or well-being of society" (p. 11). As a result, such statements have prompted teachers to encourage parents to join the learning situation so the teachers can justify to the parents the content of their program and the manner in which it is implemented to the children. Bond (1973) recalled Lady Plowden's words

> The ultimate responsibility for the child rests with the parents and that the child will develop his full potential only if the education has the full support of the parent. To give this, the parent must be recognized as an equal partner by the teacher and must know and understand what it is the school is doing. (p. 46)

By encouraging parent interaction, teachers are able to explain and share their method of assessing and recording a childs' progress. Showing samples of children's work over a period of time makes it possible for the teacher to talk with the parents about their child in positive terms. In return, the information that parents relate about their child's progress and attitude to learning, from the perspective of the home environment, is very significant and important in collaborating the bond between the teacher, the parent and the child. ELIC (1986) stressed that "it is necessary to show parents that we, as teachers, value their experiences with, and knowledge of their children and that we need the benefit of their particular skills in the classroom" (p. 10).

There are also practical reasons for a teacher to establish contact with parents. Due to financial cuts by the South Australian Government, educational resources are not as

abundant as they have been. This problem can be ameliorated by the participation of the parents who can be considered valuable allies in collecting resources from contacts within the community, for raising money for specific items, or for their voluntary assistance within the classroom environment. Another practical reason is, if parents are kept informed about new teaching methods and can see how they are implemented to benefit their children, there will be more parent support within the kindergarten or school learning environment.

In 1986, the South Australian Premier, John Bannon, made a policy statement which was titled "Education : The Right Start". Throughout this policy statement, Bannon promised that for the next four years the Labor Government's policy would be to ensure a quality and relevant education for all children in South Australia. He stated, "we will declare 1986 the year of 'Parents and Students in Schools' (PASS) to ensure that parents' voices are heard and that our schools are responsive to parents' concerns" (p. 3).

As part of the PASS promotion, a major telephone system referred, to as Hot-line, was set up in Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia. The objective was for parents and students from anywhere within the state of South Australia to take the opportunity to phone in and express their views, concerns and opinions about the education system. It created an opportunity for parents and students to speak out, and it created an awareness so that individual schools could respond.

This unique method of communication and interaction became the public audit of education in South Australia, and as a result, a wide range of information was collected from the respondents. Seventy one percent of the callers were involved with a school in some way, as a member of the school council, or parent club, or as a volunteer working mainly in the classroom listening to students read or helping in the canteen. Greater encouragement from the teachers, for more parental involvement was suggested by 39% of the callers, as the best way of improving the parent effectiveness within the education system. As Builder (1986) stated, "real involvement is a sharing of skills, knowledge,

attitudes and strategies and the creation of an ongoing teaching partnership between the professional teacher and the professional parent" (p.21).

Summary

Parental involvement within early childhood education allows for the home and school environments to merge so that there is an ongoing learning and partnership between parent and teacher. The emphasis has moved from parents only, to emphasis on home to school, to emphasis on parent/teacher partnership.

Value of Parent Involvement

An important factor of the teacher/child relationship, is that basically what teachers know about the individual child is largely discovered from within the school. According to Morrison (1978)

> if parents are supported (by the teacher) in developing knowledge, skills and abilities relating to parenting and if families are involved in meaningful interaction with their children, then the long range effect will be increased achievement of children in school settings, enhancement of their daily lives, and more involved and self fulfilled parents. (p. v)

This statement reinforced the notion that interaction with the child's parent builds a more meaningful and understanding relationship for the teacher with regard to the individual child and that the end result has positive advantages for the child, the teacher and the parents. Douglas (1968) agreed that a child's capacity to do well in school or kindergarten is, to a certain degree dependent on the encouragement given by parents.

Parental involvement, whether it is passive or active, can motivate the child to do well socially, mentally, physically and emotionally, and therefore enhance the development of the whole child. Children show many talents and skills at home and/or school which are unknown to either the teacher or the parent. Acquiring talents and skills could be a result of either informal or formal educational activities. Berger (1986) suggested that

> whether sufficiently appreciated or not, parents have always reared and educated their children until informal education was supplemented by formal education. There is now emerging an increasing awareness of the link between informal and formal instruction. Parents can enhance the informal education of their children by knowledge of the formal educational process, and although they are encouraged to teach in an informal manner, the stepping stones of early formal education are being realized. (p.103)

Closer contact between the parent and teacher can give each a more complete picture of a child's abilities and, in turn, may improve the overall continuity and consistency goals for the benefit of the child.

As a result of parent/teacher interaction, the child will identify both the school and home as places to learn and parents and teachers as sources of knowledge. For the child the learning is extended beyond the classroom setting, it is on-going and continuous. It becomes more spontaneous, flexible and creates a wider and varied range of constructive formal or informal learning situations for the child. Umansky (1983) suggested that children whose parents have encouraged child initiative and creativity are better prepared for the educational and social experiences of the academic setting and that the children meet with greater school success. It could be said that parents create the conditions for children's success or failure, and because of their involvement, they have the ability to help their children, not just in the short term but with results that last for a life time. Berger (1986) described parents as being the "one continuous force in the education of their children from birth to adulthood" (p. 104). It is the parents therefore, who transmit the initial values and standards to a child. As such it is sensible to perceive that for the reinforcement of values and standards, a home/school link would be beneficial for the needs of the whole child.

Parent /teacher interaction seems even more crucial, if one considers the statements made by Jencks et al. (1972). They advocated that family influences are not changed when

a child leaves the home environment. They gave three reasons why school reform does not change family influences. Firstly, children are far more influenced by what happens at home, than at school. Secondly, school reforms have little effect on those variables which affect a child's life. Finally, the influence of the school does not persist into adult life. Pestalozzi (1915) said that "for children, the teachings of their parents will always be the core, and as for the schoolmaster, we can give thanks to God if he is able to put a decent shell around the core" (p.26).

Cullingford (1985) said that parents are not a "new invention" in the educational world, but to be in contact with the continual changing theories related to the development and understanding of how children learn, it can be seen that parent/teacher interaction is essential. Frost (1966), stressed that

> an important education agency in every culture is the family. Here is to be found both formal and informal education. Parents teach their children by merely living with them in the family group. They are examples which children follow instinctively. They also teach directly by telling and showing, by praising when the children conform and punishing when they fail to measure up to the standards set by the family group. The family is first in time, and in many ways the most important teaching agency in any society. (p. 12)

If parents share knowledge of their children with the teacher, it enables them to have some influence and make a contribution to the education of the child. Burke (1985) suggested that maybe the time has come to consider a three way interaction. She advocates a parent/child/teacher collaborative relationship where each participant is accepted as equal among equals. Burke stated that when responsibility is shared, "all three become learners and teachers, and tackle learning from a problem-solving perspective, where mistakes are regarded as opportunities to learn, and where parent, teacher and child are all recognized as valuable, though different contributors to a common goal" (p. 17).

Parent/teacher communication creates a compatible relationship, as both parties are striving for a child's success. Cullingford (1985) said "it is the growing curiosity about young children that could lead to more harmony between parents and teachers, each recognizing the importance of the other" (p.15). To encourage this harmony, a teacher needs to have initiative and people skills to utilize the parent relationship. A teacher needs to take advantage of the abilities and talents of the parents so as to enrich the learning program, which in turn will increase parental interest in the kindergarten or school.

Morrison (1978) said "parent involvement is a process of actualizing the potential of parents, of helping parents discover their strengths, potentialities and talents; and of using them for the benefit of themselves and the family" (p. 22). This indicates that for parental involvement to be of real value, teachers need to address the parents' personal attitudes about schools, and persuade the parents that their assistance and support in the classroom will be beneficial to their children.

Whilst parents may take a natural interest in the education of their own children, their attitudes toward school in general are largely dependent on memories of their own schooling. Teachers, therefore, need to develop skills and initiative to assist in creating a successful non-threatening interaction; skills that enable them through established communication channels to recruit, select and assign parent participants to mutually agreed upon classroom assignments. Teachers need to be able to specify and communicate clearly the necessary objectives of the parent roles. For this interaction to occur, parents should be asked early in the year if they have any talents or experiences they would be willing to share with the class. Teachers can then provide structured relevant teaching material and coordination for the planned activities and most importantly, they can create the opportunity to provide the participants with positive reinforcement, feedback and support for the ongoing activities. The teacher is then able to emerge a more confident and prepared person with definite clear-cut aims and objectives relating to parent involvement and the benefits it contributes to education.

The value of parental involvement to parents is that it offers them the opportunity to have some influence and to make a positive contribution to the education of their children. Rutherford and Edgar (1979) state that "any gains made in the classroom are limited without a stimulating environment at home, where the child spends the greatest portion of time" (p.27). Involving parents and integrating facets of the home environment into programs within the kindergarten and junior primary classes, increases the avenues of communication between home and the learning place and maximizes the developmental potential of young children.

Differences in culture, family grouping, socio-economic circumstances and life experiences are a fact of life in our society. Quite often is in kindergarten or school that a child first becomes aware of these differences. A parent/teacher relationship based on respect for individual differences could ensure that a child's progress is not inhibited by conflicting expectations and behaviors that have been instilled in them by the important adults in their lives. ELIC (1986) said "differences among children and their families can add color, richness and variety to school life and have the potential for enriching parent/teacher relationships and providing increased opportunities for learning" (p. 13).

Kohlberg (1968) agreed with the epistemologist Piaget, who said that learning is a cognitive development which is acquired through the environment and takes into account seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, analyzing, synthesizing, and receiving feed-back from the environment. Piaget described environment as a place that permits a child to reconstruct, come to know, and understand his or her physical and social world. It is a place that emerges as the child's cognitive development unfolds and during this stage of a child's growth, the parent feels comfortable because it is a natural process. The parent is sensitive to the child and can see the child respond according to the interest, reassurance and guidance that is shown to him/her. Parents can relate to the progress of their child because the growth is spontaneous, non-threatening and visual.

Parents have many different reasons for wanting to be involved in their child's education. Some visit the school or kindergarten to attend meetings, carnivals, special events, fetes or parent/teacher interviews. Some indicate a general interest in what is going on in the kindergarten or school, so they come to be informed observe and interact with their child or other children within the learning situation. Others want to create a mutual understanding with the teacher that will help to enhance their child's learning. The value of these interactions are two fold, as both the child and the teacher can see that the parent is interested in the learning environment. Cullingford (1985), indicated that parents have an ambiguous role in the education system, in that

> they are consumers who demand a service. They are also an important part of the provision in themselves. Parents are both central to the system, whether the system likes the fact or not, and are clients of the system. They reveal a sense that schools should not only be answerable to the clients, but that the clients should know about what is going on so that they can be involved. (p.12)

Statements such as the above reinforce the position that parental involvement is essential within the educational system and that continual positive action is needed to encourage it.

Summary

Parent participation at whatever level, is most productive and worthwhile when the parents can view their own participation as being directly linked to their children's achievement. This actualization creates an important intrinsic reward and reinforcement for parents because they are part of the success experienced by their children.

Models of Parent Involvement

Bauch, Vietze and Morris (1973) made reference to three forms of parental participation which they saw as being part of most early childhood programs:

1. Parental participation aimed at assisting the parents in their role as educational facilitator for their child. This form of parental participation should contribute to the

skills, knowledge and attitudes of parents so that their effectiveness as parents and teachers of their children could be increased.

2. Parental participation with mutual benefit to parents and to the early childhood program, where parents would serve as resources to the program by acting as aides and substitutes.

3. Parent participation in support of the early childhood program. In this situation parents would supplement the program budget through such activities as furniture building, outdoor supervision and bake sales. (p.52-53)

Trying to describe programs for parent involvement is a difficult task. There is no one way of classifying types of parental involvement according to any particular area, because within each one, there is a great deal of commonality and overlap.

The head start model

Head Start is one example of parent involvement, and it has been in operation since 1965. As well as offering a well organized educational program for the children, this program involves parents in various other aspects of family life, including monitoring dental and health care, offering resources from within the community, learning about nutritional food for their children and informing parents on career opportunities. For the Head Start program to be developed within an area, parents have to complete a needs assessment questionnaire (see Appendix A). As a result, responses determine how plans for parent participation can be devised for the benefit of the parent, the child and the teacher within a community. Possible involvement avenues include those outlined in Figure 1.

Figure removed for copyright purposes

Figure 1. The Head Start Model. (Berger 1986, p. 196).

The spokes indicate parent involvement in a variety of forms, rotating from a school base that reaches out to meet the needs of parents, children and the community. Parents can be involved as a supporter of the program or as an active participant and as they become more familiar and confident with the procedure, they are encouraged to extend their involvement. Throughout the program, parents' needs and suggestions are continuously being updated and renewed and as they become more familiar and involved with the operation of the program, their requests both for themselves and their children become

more sophisticated and their involvement may even become orientated towards administration and decision making concerns.

As a result, the average Head Start program can now also involve parents at decision making and administrative levels by offering the Head Start Center Committee, Head Start Policy Committee for the delegate agency, and/or the Head Start Policy Council. These various levels of involvement within the program reinforce the justification and success of the world renowned Head Start program.

School of the air model

With continual development in communication and information systems from home to school and school to home, parents are being seen as partners in education. One unique example of a developed communication and information system involves Australian parents who live in the outback areas of the country, and who have taken a major role in their child's education. The children receive their lessons by correspondence and by using a short wave radio; they are able to interact on a daily basis with a teacher who is stationed at the headquarters for the School of the Air. It is the role of the parent to supervise the lessons, instruct the children when necessary and ensure that the lessons are completed and posted on the due date. Deer (1980) said of Australian parent involvement, that the role of the teacher is moving from an "instrumental one ('schools are for teaching kids'), where parental 'deficiencies' need to be remedied, towards a 'community facilitator' dimension, where the school is a resource center, and the contexts of learning are widened into the home" (p.21).

Gordon's parent involvement model

Another effective model of parent involvement has been outlined by Gordon (1969). This model shown in Figure 2 is in the shape of a wheel and categorizes parent involvement into six levels, each being identified as a section of the wheel. The six levels are described as: classroom volunteer, adult learner, decision maker, adult educator, para-professional and teach own child.

A parent who is involved as a classroom volunteer, attends to requests from the teacher or school and acknowledges information circulated about kindergarten or school activities. This type of involved parent also comes to assist the teacher with tasks such as making aids, or filing resources and the potential to develop rapport and friendly parent/teacher interaction exists. The parent's roles as adult learner and adult educator can be linked because as learners, parents seek to become involved in workshops or extra-curricular

Figure removed for copyright purposes

Figure 2. (Gordon 1969, p. 9).

activities that will develop their personal skills, their knowledge about child development, and enhance their ability to become better educators of their children at home, or at kindergarten/school. This type of involvement encourages parents to become involved in organizing interest centers and interacting with small groups of children for extra-curricular activities. Parents working as para-professionals or decision makers are seeking to be

more involved in the planning of curriculum activities, administrative procedures, and school philosophies and to accept executive roles within the kindergarten/school. These six levels as depicted by the spokes can be added or subtracted from the wheel, depending upon how many levels need to be categorized.

Long's clamp model

According to Long (1983) "the teacher recognizes the role of the parent as the primary educator of the young child" (p.3), and as a result, fosters and develops the parent-child learning bond and complements the parent's educative role. Long referred to this concept of parent involvement as the "clamp model", shown in Figure 3, whereby a teacher recognizes the educative role the parent has already implemented and as such, can foster and develop the parent-child learning bond and enhance the parents' educative role.

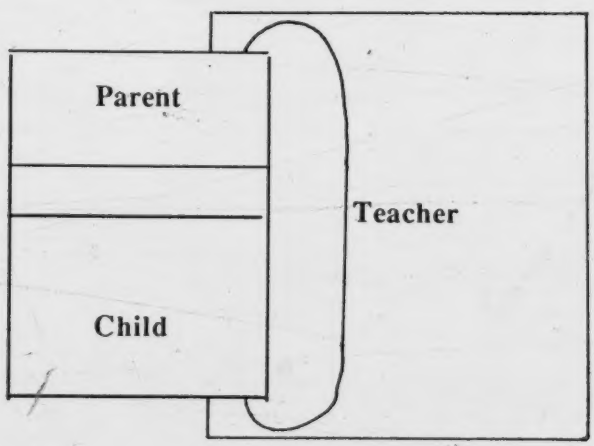

Figure 3. Adapted from: (Long 1983, p.4).

Rathbone and Graham's three stage process model

Another model has been devised by Rathbone and Graham (1981) who called parental involvement a three-stage process, with each stage being of equal value for the parent, the teacher and the child. Rathbone and Graham used the terms peripheral involvement, collaboration and partnership to illustrate their model. (Figure 4.)

Figure removed for copyright purposes

Figure 4. (Rathbone and Graham 1981, p.146).

Peripheral involvement includes parents portraying a role, as recipients and supporters in such areas as fund-raising, or observing special events such as book week. Book week is based on a pre-determined state wide theme and is a recognized event throughout the state of South Australia, with kindergartens and schools participating at some level in the promotion of reading, story telling, themes for plays, poetry and displays relating to the importance and relevance of books for pleasure as well as educational purposes.

Collaboration, the second stage in the process, includes parents participating in specific limited educational tasks, such as listening to reading or instructing a group of children in a set activity. The third stage, partnership, involves parents participating in tutoring individual children, or assisting the school in promoting different cultures. The idea of being able to choose at what level they wish to be involved enables the parents to build increased confidence and self-esteem while being given a valid part to play in their child's learning.

Parent learning models

As well as being involved in the educational aspect of child development, there are various programs designed for parents that incorporate topics related to the social and emotional aspect of child development. Wolfendale (1982), used the word mutual when he referred to this type of parental involvement,"mutual involvement, mutual accountability, mutual gain and mutual trust" (p.49). The word mutual could also be related to topics such as, improving family relations, communication, interpersonal relations, or how to cope with misbehavior. Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) is a program designed to help parents deal with and resolve problems such as child/parent power or child/parent conflict. Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) offers group discussions, (either formal or informal, depending on the needs of the group), with the aim of guiding parents towards more positive relationships with their children. The above mentioned programs are in operation in the region of Yorke Peninsula in South Australia and, it would seem, throughout most countries in the world.

Kohlberg's stream models

Peters, Neisworth, and Yawkey (1985) wrote that theorist Kohlberg conceptualized three broad streams of learning essential for educational development that are functional and positive in early childhood development. They are known as the maturationist-socialization stream, the cultural-training or behaviorist stream and the cognitive-developmental or interactionist stream.

The maturationist-socialization stream involves learning self expression through such areas as dramatic play and creative activities. Kohlberg (1968) described it as allowing "the child to blossom in a warm, supportive social environment" (p.39). The parent/teacher need only establish the environment.

The cultural-training or behaviorist stream means consistency and standards with regard to providing such things as salient models of desired child behavior, or introducing pre-

academic skills. Kohlberg (1968) said that the cultural-training or behaviorist method "prepares a child for later education and for integration into the mainstream of life" (p. 39).

The cognitive-developmental stream indicates that each child develops at his/her own rate, and in his/her own time. Kohlberg (1968) suggested that learning should "emerge naturally from the interaction between the child and the environment under conditions in which such interaction is allowed and fostered" (p.39).

The educator, be it the teacher or the parent, has the responsibility for setting the stage to ensure desirable and meaningful interactions for the child with given agents within an environment. What will be meaningful depends upon the child's level of development at the time. With positive liaison and understanding, parents and teachers could become aware of each other's roles, responsibilities, problems and concerns and work together to maximize learning experiences for the child. A parent/teacher combination is a viable means of providing an optimal educational environment.

These theories are a basis for the whole child development process at the early childhood level and, as Peters, Neisworth and Yawkey (1985) described, indicate that learning should be spontaneous, non-threatening, non-stressful and occur at each child's individual rate. Parents can feel confident to contribute and participate in such a child development process within an early childhood program because learning, at this point of a child's development, is recognized as being on-going and therefore occurs at all times and anywhere. Woodhead (1981) said "a truly cooperative perspective of early education is founded on a vision which recognizes the importance of all the contexts in which a young child learns, be it at home or school, in a park, at the shops, or elsewhere" (p.236). Kohlberg's streams theory and Woodhead's different venues indicate that there are other "agents", as Peters, Neisworth and Yawkey (1985) called them, involved in the early childhood learning process; agents such as parents, grandparents, siblings, peers, as well as other adults and children.

Summary

Although these models stress different aspects of teacher/parent involvement, they all assume the value of such interaction. Further a number of them document the range of activities in which parents might engage.

The Head Start Model stresses parent involvement and learning. In South Australia the PET and STEP programs for parents stress these aspects. The idea of parent as facilitator and teacher is clearest in the School of the Air model. In regular school settings, the out of school educational role of the parent is often desregarded or discounted.

While Kolberg's theories stress the variety of interventions used in child development, Gordon's model most clearly delineates the different roles of the parent in relation to school programs and Rathbone and Graham's model suggests that parents move through these roles from peripheral involvement to partnership. In contrast, Long's notion of the teacher/parent/child relationship places the major emphasis on the parent/child relationship and the teacher's supportive role.

Conceptual Framework

The focus of this research is parental involvement in schooling as perceived by parents and teachers. For the purpose of this study, a general model based on Gordon (1969) but incorporating Rathbone and Graham's notion of differential involvement and the Head Start, School of the Air and Parent Learning model ideas on parents as learners was developed.as being indicative of parent participant roles in the South Australian education system (see Figure 1).

The four divisions are referred to as a.) parents as recipients and supporters, b.) parents as volunteer educators, c.) parents as non-instructional in-class volunteers and d.) parents as instructional volunteers. Using these four divisions, the extent of parent involvement can be measured according to the parents' or teachers' perception. Parents as recipients and supporters perceive involvement to be returning completed forms, meeting with the teacher for interviews to discuss or be informed about the childs' progress, or attending

school events such as open days and meetings. With this kind of involvement, parents' input is supportive, but controlled by the actions of the teachers. As a volunteer educator, those parents who hear children read or supervise lessons that have been planned by the teacher have the opportunity to extend this ongoing type of involvement into the home situation. As non-instructional in-class volunteers, parents who act as aides by making material or equipment for use in the classroom, or filing and maintaining resource equipment, enhance the input of the teacher for quality teaching time. Many parents indicate that they have expertise in areas that they would like to share with children as an instructional volunteer. This could include parents with musical skills, cooking, or parents who came from another ethnic background. Recognition of the importance of parent involvement since the 1950's reaffirms statements by Builder (1986) and Berger (1986) that parents as classroom partners are valuable to all concerned. However, some teachers may not see parents who are supportive, or who participate as a non-instructional volunteer, as being involved in early childhood education. Their perspective of parent involvement in early childhood education need not be the same as that of the parents.

Summary

The literature reviewed for this chapter relates to the history of parent involvement, and to some of the influences which have been responsible for the growing emphasis of parent involvement in early childhood education. The literature reaffirms the benefits to parents and children as well as teachers when parents are accepted as partners in the educational enterprise. It also documents the lack of a comprehensive model for parent involvement.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the context and design of the study and describes the instrument used. A description of the study sample, the respondents and how the data were collected and analyzed are included.

Introduction

The nature of this study is exploratory Burton (1981); that is to say the study will collect and then explore the perceived opinions of parents and teachers who are involved in the education of children in kindergarten, reception and year one. Babbie (1979) suggested that exploratory studies are done "simply to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding" (p. 7). However, as is evident from the literature review, few studies which have examined parents' views of involvement in early childhood education have been documented. This study is a beginning in this regard. Further, it uses Gordon's model as the basis for the study and is an exploration of its utility in the South Australian context.

Context

South Australia is one of the seven states of Australia and in 1983 the population was 1.3 million, spread across a vast and varied geographic domain that measures 984,377 square kilometers. As a comparison, Alberta, during 1983, had a population of 2.2 million people, in an area of 661,185 square kilometers. Because of the great distances, the state of South Australia has been divided into five educational regions, each having a central office and its own superintendent. Kindergartens have been regionalized in a similar manner, into five autonomous units. Three of these regions are considered to be metropolitan regions and two are known as country regions. The Yorke Peninsula district, where the data were gathered, is a section of a country region. From the Yorke Peninsula district, six towns that have both a school and a kindergarten were selected for the study. Demographic variables such as town size, socio-economic status, natural resources, and

options available to the community members who live within the town boundaries, were considered when choosing the six schools. It is anticipated that even though these six towns are rural, the difference in the demographic variables will lead to a varied range of parent involvement perceptions as seen by the parents and teachers. The population ranges from 350 in the smaller towns, to 4,500 in the large central town. Two of the towns are situated on the coastline; one is recognized as South Australia's major grain export port, while the other is a very popular summer holiday resort. It is interesting to note that compared to the rest of South Australia, a significantly higher proportion of the population in Yorke Peninsula is Australian-born. Although overseas migration has been an important factor of population growth for the state, the growth in the overseas-born population of Yorke Peninsula has been marginal. Therefore, ethnic groups are not considered to be a major factor for this study.

Design of the Study

A questionnaire survey design was seen as the most appropriate format for this study. There are many advantages to using the questionnaire as a means of collecting data. In this particular study, because data were collected from the researcher's home country, Australia, it was a practical and efficient method. According to Mouly (1974), the impersonal quality of the questionnaire might mean that responses are more objective and candid as respondents feel freer to express unpopular and troublesome views.

Respondents

The respondents selected for this study were the parents and teachers associated with the six kindergartens, and parents and teachers involved with the six school junior primary reception and year one classes. The relevant questionnaires were mailed to 276 parents of kindergarten parents, 289 parents of reception and year one children, 23 junior primary teachers and 12 kindergarten teachers.

Data collection procedures

Approval to proceed with data collection was first obtained from the University of Alberta Department of Educational Administration Research Ethics Review Committee. The Director of Services for the Children's Services Office in South Australia was contacted and consent was given for the six kindergartens to participate in the research collection. Letters were written to the six principals of the chosen schools and similar permission was granted for the teachers. In South Australia a school principal has the authority to decide about school participation in research projects.

The directors of the kindergartens and the teachers of the junior primary classes received an introductory letter outlining the purpose of the study and a request seeking their permission to participate. The written consents received indicated their willingness to be involved. Kindergarten directors and teachers of reception and year one informed the parents of the intended questionnaire through the school and kindergarten newsletters. So although written consent of the parents was not sought, the parents were aware of the purpose and nature of the study. It was clearly stated that participation was voluntary and respondents were advised that a copy of the final study would be made available to each participating school and kindergarten.

A covering letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and what was required from each respondent was attached to every parent and teacher questionnaire. An envelope was also included and the respondents were asked to return their questionnaire in the sealed envelope. This process assured anonymity. On a given date, a research assistant collected the questionnaires from a pre-arranged base and mailed them to Canada.

Response rate

Sixty eight percent of kindergarten parents, 63% of reception and year one parents, 74% of junior primary teachers and 83% of kindergarten teachers returned the questionnaires. Overall 65% of parents and 77% of teachers responded to the study for a cumulative response rate of 66%.

Survey questionnaire

From a generic questionnaire format, four questionnaires were designed for kindergarten parents, reception and year one parents (see Appendix B), and for kindergarten, reception and year one teachers.(see Appendix C). All questionnaires had a similar design but specific wordings were used for the different groups and each questionnaire was color coded. The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections, background data, data related to the tasks and general opinions.

Section one

The first section of the parents' questionnaire sought general background information pertaining to the child and parent. This included the placement of the child within the family structure and the early childhood education system and how, if at all, the parent perceived their role within the education system. Other questions in this section included whether the parents were employed, the level of education attained by the parent filling out the questionnaire and the biological relationship of the parent and child. The first section of the teacher questionnaire asked for the years of teaching experience and the number of years spent teaching either kindergarten, reception or year one children,

Section two

This section sought the the extent of actual and preferred involvement as perceived by the parent and teacher. Each respondent circled their perception of actual involvement on the first line of the answer categories and preferred involvement on the second line according to the question asked. The four point scale used ranged from Always=A, Often=O (75%) of the time, Sometimes=ST (50%), Seldom=S (25%), Never=N.

An example:

Do you visit your child's classroom	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
to observe lessons?	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N

The four questionnaires asked the same questions, but some words were changed to relate to either the kindergarten, school, parent or teacher situation. For example.

kindergarten teachers refer to their building as a center, while the junior primary teachers refer to their building as a classroom.

The individual items were developed in three stages. First using Gordon's (1969) model as a guide, items were developed for each heading, parents as recipients and supporters, parents as educators, parents as non-instructional in-class volunteers and parents as instructional volunteers. Then the researcher started an independent list based on her experience and on suggestions from the literature, (Fantini 1980; Stallworth 1982; and Builder 1986). Finally another list was developed as other early childhood teachers and parents of young children were canvassed for items. The second and third lists were combined and similar items eliminated. Then this list was compared with the first list and all new items were added. Lastly, items on the final list were put in random order to avoid bias.

Section three

The third section of the questionnaire asked respondents to list the barriers to their involvement, offer suggestions as to how these barriers could be overcome and make any additional comments they desired.

Pilot Study

To ascertain the feasibility of the initial questionnaire, a draft was piloted with 12 Australian parents with young children, within the student community. The feedback received suggested few alterations before the final questionnaires were sent to South Australia.

Data Analysis

The data collected were transferred to computer tape for statistical analysis. Factor analysis and frequencies and percentage frequencies were used to categorize the data. Analysis of variance and t-tests were used as tests for statistical significance.

Summary

This chapter has described the methodology and context for the study, the development of the instrument has been outlined and the data collection and analysis procedures detailed. The results of the study are outlined in Chapter 4.

Chapter Four

REPORT OF FINDINGS

The specific purpose of this chapter, is to describe the findings of the study in terms of the four major research questions.

Parent Respondents

Three hundred and seventy parents from the six kindergartens and junior primary schools chosen from within the Yorke Peninsula district, responded to the survey. Of those who completed the survey, 96% were mothers. Section one of the survey (see Appendix B) sought demographic data about the number of children in the home, the educational level attained and whether one or both parents worked full or part-time.

Year level of child Of the 370 parents, 142 had children in kindergarten, 61 parents had children in reception and 75 parents had children in year one. A fourth group of 92 parents had children in more than one grade level. When the fourth group is mentioned in the discussion of the research, it will be referred to as the mixed group.

Pre-kindergarten children Since parents were asked to indicate whether they had younger children, only the kindergarten parent group could be measured as having pre-kindergarten children. As such, 69 of the 142 kindergarten parents indicated that there were pre-kindergarten children within the family unit.

Children in primary school or beyond Parents also indicated if there were older school-age children in the home. Of the parents with year one children, 75 had other school age children.

Working and at-home parents Responses showed that 168 parents worked outside the home and 201 parents were at home. Working parents means both parents worked either in full time and/or part time employment.

Education level of parent respondents One hundred and twenty two parents completed some high school, while 146 finished their high school qualifications. Because the

numbers in each of the five categories of education were too small for data analysis the three categories, some tertiary, finished tertiary and university degree, were combined and called more than high school education. Ninety seven parent respondents had either completed some tertiary, or had finished their tertiary education and two indicated they had a university degree.

Teacher Respondents

Ten teachers from the six chosen kindergartens and seventeen teachers from the junior primary classes responded to the survey. In part one of the survey, questions sought information on how long the teacher had been teaching that particular year level and for how many years the teacher had been in the teaching profession. Responses indicated that both kindergarten and junior primary teachers had been teaching for an average of 12 years. Kindergarten teacher responses showed that 9 years was the average number of years of teaching at kindergarten level while junior primary teachers had taught for an average of 5 years, and year one teachers for an average of 7 years.

Problem 1 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement in early childhood education as perceived by parents?

Parents were asked to respond to twenty six questionnaire items in part two of the survey. These items were based on possible tasks which parents do in assisting in their child's education. Since Gordon (1969) had suggested that such tasks formed smaller clusters, a factor analysis was used to reduce these twenty six items into manageable concepts. Polit & Hungler (1983) described a factor analysis as being used when there is a need to reduce a large set of items or variables into a smaller, more manageable and explainable set of concepts. This procedure helped to identify the underlying patterns of relationships within the questionnaire items and clustered them into eight factors. A varimax rotation was used and items were considered to contribute to the meaning of a factor if the loading was greater than or equal to 0.40 and if the items included in a factor contributed logically to the meaning of the factor.

Each factor was assigned a heading which represented most clearly the items in that factor. Three items were double loaded. One item, Do you attend parent teacher interviews? showed a loading in factor one and factor six. Two other items, Do you go on class excursions? and Do you organize interest centers? also loaded on two factors. All were included in the factor they related to conceptually. The eight factors, the number of items loaded at or above 0.40 on each factor, and the ranges of the loadings were as follows:

Factor	N	Range of Loadings
1. Attending at school	6	.461 to .680
2. Assisting with children	3	.634 to .776
3. Talking with teacher	3	.730 to .802
4. Home support	4	.435 to .810
5. Assisting teacher	4	.518 to .698
6. Attending learning workshops	3	.518 to .675
7. Helping with resources	2	.625 to .758
8. Friendship with teacher	2	.533 to .766

For each of the eight levels, there was a statistically significant difference between the scores of actual parent involvement and preferred parent involvement. Parents would prefer to be more involved in the education of their children for each of the eight levels. Therefore, for this section of the study, the actual parent involvement only will be analyzed and discussed. The individual loadings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Varimax Factor Solution for 26 Variables of Actual Involvement Using Eight Factors.

	Factors and Factor Loadings							
General Parent Involvement	Attending at school	Assisting with chn.	Talking with tr.	Home support	Assisting teacher	Attending learning workshops	Helping with resources	Teacher friend ship
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do you volunteer for canteen?	.680	.180	-.040	.272	.116	.004	-.016	.137
Do you attend meetings?	.662	.143	.091	-.046	-.006	.299	-.071	.280
Do you help with fundraising?	.617	.152	.081	.350	.052	-.019	.075	-.086
Do you attend open days?	.590	-.208	.189	.095	.123	.335	.300	-.200
Do you attend P/Tr interviews?	.461	-.166	.056	.105	.104	.464	.262	-.249
Do you supervise chn at play?	.085	.776	-.009	-.153	.198	.043	.173	.109
Do you mark chn's work in class?	.042	.727	-.012	-.073	-.089	.185	.165	.023
Do you visit your child's class?	.170	.634	.161	.046	.238	-.024	.062	-.069
Does tr. help you understand methods?	.171	.009	.802	-.035	.076	.167	.158	-.055
Does tr. keep you informed re child?	-.061	-.077	.787	.068	.121	-.036	.135	.122
Do you get a choice of involvement?	.096	.229	.730	.072	.074	.111	-.181	.028
Do you respond to newsletters?	.145	-.043	-.011	.810	.085	.069	-.123	-.028
Do you return requests for material?	.075	-.110	-.026	.749	-.005	.126	.127	.015
Does your involvement help child?	.275	.315	.252	.470	.058	.229	.003	-.092
Do you help with child's homework?	.075	-.146	.210	.435	.003	.143	.281	.053

Table 1 (Continued)

	Factors and Factor Loadings							
	Attending at school	Assisting with chn.	Talking with tr.	Home support	Assisting teacher	Attending learning workshops	Helping with resources	Teacher friend ship
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do you assist in story telling?	.082	.254	.018	.250	.698	.101	-.045	.082
Do you hear chn read in class?	.108	-.057	.184	-.088	.625	.107	.278	-.033
Do you go on class excursions?	.504	.150	.046	-.217	.526	-.045	.014	-.044
Do you organize interest centers?	.002	.254	.136	.229	.518	-.028	.427	.007
Do you attend workshops?	.243	.085	.106	.151	.022	.675	.039	.088
Do you offer tr. ideas & suggestions?	-.008	.254	-.071	.159	.314	.589	.015	-.007
Are there extra-curricular activities?	.003	.050	.376	.115	-.084	.518	.006	.027
Do you file resource material?	-.006	.236	-.006	-.068	.019	.153	.758	.174
Do you make equipment for class?	.127	.199	.071	.168	.273	-.080	.625	.069
Do you do typing for class?	.081	.122	.079	.065	-.075	-.075	.364	.766
Does the teacher visit your home?	.011	-.185	.072	-.128	.396	.326	-.068	.533

A description of each factor and a rationale for placement of items follows

Factor 1: Attending at school

Items in this factor describe parent involvement as a support role for designated school activities, or events that portray peripheral roles for parents within the classroom.

Factor 2: Assisting with children

Items in this factor describe parent involvement as assisting the children as a housekeeping support for the teacher. It would appear that the parent input is limited to specific educational tasks.

Factor 3: Talking with teacher

Items in this factor indicate an interaction between the parent and the teacher which, according to Long (1983), is an "official acceptance of the educative role of the parent" (p.2) by the teacher. This parent/teacher interaction, gives parents the chance to gather information relating to curriculum content and teaching techniques. As well, parents have the choice and opportunity to play a more cooperative role within the classroom.

Factor 4: Home support

Items in this factor indicate that parent involvement takes place as a result of requests sent home either by the teacher, or the school. Berger (1986) suggested that most parents respond to notices of programs and requests when called upon to do so, because their general philosophy is that the school is a part of the family social system and they are committed to respond accordingly.

Factor 5: Assisting the teacher

Items in this factor indicate that teachers meet with parents in order to plan organized groups and appropriate activities using parent expertise. Parents may be involved in a wide range of constructive learning situations which enable them to share their expertise or serve as a resource within the classroom's instructional program.

Factor 6: Attending learning workshops

Items in this factor indicate that parent involvement centers around curriculum and instructional activities through workshops and committees. Christofis (1981) stated that one South Australian school "periodically in order to inform parents about new curricular and to familiarize parent with methodology," holds a "School's Different Session" (p. 7). These activities develop parents' skills and attitudes and as a result, parents and teachers form a partnership that reinforces these skills and the on going learning concepts for the benefit of the child.

Factor 7: Helping with resources

Items in this factor indicate that parent involvement could be defined as a clerical or technological support for the teacher within the classroom. Fantini (1980) referred to this kind of involvement as "producer-related" (p.38). It can occur when parents are called upon by the teacher to take part in class room maintenance activities, for example, to set up activity centers, or perhaps organize options based on the skills or specific interests they have to offer.

Factor 8: Friendship with teacher

Items in this factor indicate that parent involvement can be developed when parents and teachers are able to ask a favor, to understand, or trust and support each other as equals either within the classroom, or within the home. Builder (1986) said "real involvement is a sharing of skills, knowledge, attitudes and strategies and the creation of an ongoing teaching partnership between the professional teacher and the professional parent" (p. 21).

The data will be discussed in terms of these factors. Original parent and teacher responses for each item are included in the tables.

Sub-problem 1.1 To what extent were there differences in involvement in early childhood programs as perceived by kindergarten, reception and year one parents?

The responses of parents have been analyzed in accordance with the eight categories of involvement as defined by the factor analysis (Table 2). Because comparisons of scores for actual and preferred involvement were statistically significant on all eight factors it was concluded that parents preferred to be more involved in the education of their children.

Parents' responses were classified according to the grade level of their child. Parents who had more than one child in the early childhood programs were excluded from this analysis.

When compared on the eight factors, kindergarten parents gave most time to tasks which could be done from home (factor 4) and to tasks which were structured interactions between the parent, teacher and school program (factors 1 and 2). Less time was spent supervising or assisting children and being involved in attending learning workshops.

In comparison, reception and year one parents gave a similar emphasis to home tasks and to structured interactions, but more frequently attended learning workshops and extra curricular activities.

The means of the three groups were compared on each factor using analysis of variance. For only two factors were there statistically significant differences among the groups. Kindergarten parents spent significantly more time interacting with children through playground supervision and class visits than did junior primary school parents ($F = 5.63$, $P = 0.00$) while junior primary parents spent significantly more time being involved in attending learning workshops and extra curricular activities than did kindergarten parents ($F = 4.25$, $P = 0.01$).

Table 2

Differences in involvement in early childhood education by kindergarten reception and year one parents.

Factor analysis variables	Group 1 Kindergarten (N=142)		Group 2 Reception (N=61)		Group 3 Year one (N=75)				
	Mean	St. deviation	Mean	St. deviation	Mean	St. deviation	F-ratio	Prob.	Sig. difference
1. Attending at school	3.13	0.93	3.10	0.83	2.94	0.83	1.09	0.33	Not significant
2. Assisting with children	2.50	0.84	1.62	0.54	1.60	0.48	56.30	0.00	1>3, 1>2
3. Talking with the teacher	3.40	0.98	3.27	1.12	3.41	0.99	0.40	0.67	Not significant
4. Home support	4.32	0.58	4.42	0.57	4.34	0.65	0.69	0.50	Not significant
5. Assisting the teacher	1.91	0.76	2.01	0.87	1.81	0.74	1.06	0.35	Not significant
6. Attending learning workshops	2.28	0.94	2.59	0.69	2.56	0.70	4.25	0.01	2>1, 3>1
7. Helping with resources	1.23	0.56	1.13	0.41	1.28	0.60	1.33	0.27	Not significant
8. Friendship with teacher	1.19	0.48	1.15	0.41	1.27	0.47	1.12	0.33	Not significant

Sub-problem 1.2 To what extent were there differences in involvement in early childhood education of working and at home parents?

Parents' responses about the extent of their involvement were classified into two categories: working, where one or both parents or caregivers were employed full or part-time, and at home, where one or both were not working outside the home. In only a few instances were both caregivers not working outside the home. Using t-tests, means for these two groups were compared on each of the factors. The data are reported in Table 3 and show that in general parents who worked and those who were at home responded similarly. The most extensive commitment from both groups was first to home support or tasks, and then to structured interactions with the school and the teachers. Parents who worked (full or part-time) were more involved in workshops and extra-curricular activities than at-home parents ($F = 4.30$, $P = 0.00$). Given the possibility that at home parents have pre-kindergarten children, they may be less able to become involved in some school activities than working parents who have transportation and child care options.

Sub-problem 1.3 To what extent were there differences in involvement in early childhood education when pre-kindergarten children were considered?

Kindergarten parents were classified on the basis of whether they had younger children at home or not. Their responses were then compared using t-tests for comparison of each factor means.

As Table 4 illustrates, in only one instance were there significant differences. Parents without younger children spent more time at workshops and extra-curricular activities than did parents with younger children. Having younger children at home would not seem to be a major barrier to involvement in school activities.

Table 3

Differences in the involvement in early childhood programs of working and at home parents.

Factor analysis variables	Group 1 Parent/s who work (N=168) Mean	St. deviation	Group 2 At home parent/s (N=201) Mean	St. deviation	T-value	Prob.	Sig. difference
1. Attending at school	3.03	0.83	3.09	0.91	-0.65	0.51	Not significant
2. Assisting with children	2.00	0.76	2.13	0.84	-1.73	0.08	Not significant
3. Talking with teacher	3.50	1.00	3.32	1.03	1.74	0.08	Not significant
4. Home support	4.37	0.58	4.35	0.59	0.24	0.81	Not significant
5. Assisting the teacher	1.86	0.75	1.92	0.75	-0.69	0.49	Not significant
6. Attending learning workshops	2.61	0.77	2.26	0.81	4.30	0.00	1>2
7. Helping with resources	1.26	0.63	1.16	0.40	1.90	0.06	Not significant
8. Friendship with teacher	1.25	0.50	1.12	0.37	2.87	0.00	1>2

Table 4

Differences in the involvement in programs of kindergarten parents with and without pre-kindergarten children.

Factor analysis variables	Group 1 Parents with pre-kdgn children (N=69) Mean	St. deviation	Group 2 Parents without pre-kdgn children (N=72) Mean	St. deviation	T-value	Prob.	Sig. difference
1. Attending at school	3.16	0.94	3.10	0.93	0.38	0.70	Not significant
2. Assisting with children	2.50	0.91	2.49	0.77	0.12	0.91	Not significant
3. Talking with the teacher	3.41	1.01	3.40	1.00	0.05	0.96	Not significant
4. Home support	4.28	0.62	4.35	0.55	-0.72	0.47	Not significant
5. Assisting the teacher	1.91	0.73	1.91	0.79	-0.06	0.95	Not significant
6. Attending learning workshops	2.12	0.92	2.44	0.94	-2.02	0.05	2>1
7. Helping with resources	1.22	0.61	1.24	0.51	-0.20	0.84	Not significant
8. Friendship with teacher	1.15	0.46	1.23	0.51	-0.94	0.35	Not significant

Sub-problem 1.4 To what extent were there differences in involvement in early childhood education when the education level of parent respondents were considered?

The levels of education were defined as some high school, finished high school and more than high school. Responses classified by this variable can be seen in Table 5.

The level of education had a statistically significant impact on five of the eight factors. Parents with more than high school education spent significantly more time attending school functions (factor 1), assisting children both inside and outside class (factors 2 and 5) and attending workshops and extra-curricular activities (factor 6), and were more likely to do typing or have the teacher visit them in their homes (factor 8), than parents with less education. More highly educated parents chose to be more involved in their childrens' education.

Summary

For parents in this study, working outside the home and having younger children at home were not generally significant variables in influencing their involvement in kindergarten/school activities. Reception and year one parents attended workshops and extra-curricular activities more often than kindergarten parents. The educational level of the parent was, in contrast, a major variable with parents with tertiary education being the most involved on 5 of the 8 factors.

Table 5

Differences in the extent of involvement in early childhood education of parents based on education level of parent respondents.

Factor Analysis Variables	Group 1 Some High School (N=122)		Group 2 Finished High School (N=146)		Group 3 More than High School (N=99)				
	Mean	St. deviation	Mean	St. deviation	Mean	St. deviation	F-ratio	Prob.	Sig. difference
1. Attending at school	2.87	0.85	2.99	0.85	3.43	0.83	13.02	0.00	3>2, 3>1
2. Assisting with children	2.04	0.87	1.97	0.75	2.21	0.81	2.66	0.07	3>2, 1>2
3. Talking with teacher	3.41	1.04	3.31	1.05	3.54	0.94	1.50	0.23	Not significant
4. Home support	4.32	0.59	4.36	0.58	4.43	0.52	1.06	0.35	Not significant
5. Assisting the teacher	1.86	0.71	1.77	0.69	2.12	0.84	6.73	0.00	3>1, 1>2
6. Attending learning workshops	2.21	0.76	2.36	0.78	2.78	0.78	15.51	0.00	3>2, 3>1
7. Helping with resources	1.16	0.48	1.21	0.53	1.26	0.54	1.03	0.36	Not significant
8. Friendship with teacher	1.08	0.31	1.14	0.41	1.35	0.54	11.94	0.00	3>2, 3>1

Problem 2 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by teachers?

A t-test used to compare teachers' responses of parent involvement for each of the eight factors showed that for every item regardless of category, teachers would prefer parents to be more involved. Each item indicated a statistically significant difference between actual and preferred levels of involvement.

Sub-problem 2.1 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by kindergarten, reception and year one teachers?

Teachers for each of the classes whose parents were surveyed, were asked to indicate their perceptions of actual parental involvement in their classroom. Their responses were divided into two categories. The kindergarten teachers responses have been kept as one category, because they are governed by a separate department, Children's Service Office and reception and year one teacher responses have been combined because the South Australian Education Department offers training to these teachers that enables them to teach either grade level. The sample of kindergarten, reception and year one teachers involved twenty seven teachers. Table 6 shows the actual differences in parent involvement on the 8 factors as perceived by teachers at the two grade levels, kindergarten and junior primary. A t-test was used to test for statistical significance.

For all but one factor, teachers perceived kindergarten parents to be more involved in early childhood education than junior primary parents. For four factors the differences in involvement were statistically significant. Kindergarten teachers rated their parents as being significantly more involved in assisting with children, helping with resources, talking with the teacher and typing for the teacher and home visitations. They tend to be more involved in the factors that are more social and require more parent/child/teacher interaction.

It is policy within the Childrens' Service Office that each kindergarten child has to be accompanied into the kindergarten center and collected at the end of each session by a parent. As a result, the kindergarten teachers have contact with the parent twice each day.

The Education Department of South Australia does not have the same policy and so reception and year one teachers may meet fewer parents on a regular basis and perceive that parents are not as involved in their childs' education.

Sub-problem 2.2 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by teachers with varying years of experience?

The teachers' actual years of experience ranged from 1 to 28 years, with no clusters evident; therefore any divisions would be arbitrary and as such this sub-problem could not be addressed.

Table 6

Differences in parent involvement as perceived by kindergarten and junior primary teachers.

Factor analysis variables	Group 1 Kindergarten (N=10) Mean	St. deviation	Group 2 J. primary (N=17) Mean	St. deviation	T-value	Prob.	Sig. difference
1. Attending at kdgn/school	3.44	0.60	3.36	0.55	0.37	0.71	Not significant
2. Assisting with children	2.77	0.39	1.57	0.40	7.55	0.00	1>2
3. Talking with the teacher	3.80	0.45	3.35	0.36	2.83	0.00	1>2
4. Home support	3.58	0.67	3.77	0.43	-0.95	0.35	Not significant
5. Assisting the teacher	3.00	0.67	2.68	0.64	1.25	0.22	Not significant
6. Attending learning workshops	2.58	0.77	2.43	0.46	0.55	0.59	Not significant
7. Helping with resources	2.55	1.07	1.47	0.60	2.94	0.01	1>2
8. Friendship with teacher	2.30	0.82	1.41	0.44	3.16	0.00	1>2

Summary

Compared to junior primary teachers, kindergarten teachers perceived that parents were significantly more involved assisting with children (t=7.55, P=0.00), talking with the teacher (t=2.83, P=0.00), helping with resources (t=2.94, P=0.01) and having a friendship with the teacher (t=3.16, P=0.00).

Problem 3 To what extent were there differences between parents and teachers on parent involvement in early childhood education?

The means of parents' and teachers' responses were compared on the eight factors of parent involvement. A t-test was used to determine statistical significance.

Table 7 showed that in general, there were statistically significant differences in the perception of parents and teachers on five of the eight factors, and on four of these the teachers perceived parents to be more involved than parents did. On factor 4, home support, the parents in contrast, rated their involvement to be more extensive.

The difficulty with comparisons such as these, is that while parents answer for themselves alone, teachers give a general class figure, which may reflect extensive involvement of a few parents rather than general participation. Also, for this problem, the teacher sample size was small in comparison to parent sample size.

Summary

Teachers perceive that parents are significantly more involved in attending at school functions such as meetings, open days, fundraising events, parent/teacher interviews and assisting the teacher in classroom activities than parents do. Their perception of parents helping with resources (t=-3.62, P=0.00) and having a friendship (t=-3.93, P=0.00) is also statistically significantly higher than the parents' perception.

However, parents see themselves as being more supportive from home (factor 4) than teachers do (t= 5.72, P=0.00).

Table 7

Differences in perceptions of parents and teachers of parent involvement in early childhood education.

Factor analysis variables	Group 1 Parent (N=370) Mean	St. deviation	Group 2 Teacher (N=27) Mean	St. deviation	T-value	Prob.	Sig. difference
1. Attending at school	3.06	0.87	3.39	0.56	-2.76	0.01	2>1
2. Assisting with children	2.06	0.81	2.01	0.71	0.30	0.78	Not significant
3. Talking with the teacher	3.40	1.02	3.52	0.45	-1.18	0.24	Not significant
4. Home support	4.36	0.58	3.70	0.53	5.72	0.00	1>2
5. Assisting the teacher	1.89	0.75	2.80	0.66	-6.08	0.00	2>1
6. Attending learning workshops	2.42	0.81	2.48	0.58	-0.53	0.60	Not significant
7. Helping with resources	1.20	0.51	1.87	0.95	-3.62	0.00	2>1
8. Friendship with teacher	1.18	0.43	1.74	0.74	-3.93	0.00	2>1

Problem 4 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by parents and teachers?

Part three of the questionnaire asked parents to list the barriers that prevented them from more involvement in early childhood education. The responses were coded and cross referenced for the five most commonly identified barriers which were younger children, work commitments, lack of confidence, lack of time and distance from kindergarten/school.

Sub-problem 4.1 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by kindergarten parents?

Thirty percent of kindergarten parents did not list any barriers that prevented them from being involved in early childhood education and many parents listed more than one barrier.

The responses received from the other 70% of kindergarten parents are listed in order of frequency of mention: younger children (51), work commitments (41), lack of time (24), distance to travel (20), and lack of confidence (16).

Younger children

Of the fifty one parents who indicated that having younger children prevented them becoming more involved, 11 also mentioned working commitments and 12 had a distance to travel. Some parents mentioned all three concerns.Twenty four parents perceived younger children to be their only barrier. One parent commented, "hopefully, when my youngest child is at kindy I will provide help as required". Many parents suggested if a creche were available and meetings were held during the day, more parents would be able to attend. "Single parents need a creche as meetings are at night." Another parent indicated that "two younger children and 15 miles to travel" were a barrier to being more involved.

Work commitments

Forty five parents indicated that work commitments prevented them from being more involved in their childrens' education. Ten also indicated a lack of time and 11 mentioned younger children as a barrier. Fifteen parents perceived that working commitments were

the only barrier. Many parents suggested that after hours activities for working parents, especially fathers, would be worthwhile. "We have a family business and other interests, so we have no time during the day. If activities were sometimes planned for night, we would be able to attend."

Lack of time

Twenty four parents stated that the time element was a major barrier to their involvement in early childhood education. Of the 24, ten of these indicated that work was also a barrier to involvement. One parent commented, "I try to be as involved as possible in my own circumstances and when I have the time." Another comment indicated that kindergartens and schools should offer day long "parent open days to allow fulltime workers to participate and see what their children are being taught." However, a comment such as "the trouble still lies with the fact that some parents just do not want to be involved, or do not have the time" indicated the barrier for many of the parents.

Distance to travel

Fifteen parents indicated distance to be a major barrier. Eight of these parents also mentioned younger children. One parent stated that it was a 26 kilometer trip, one way, each time they went to the kindergarten, therefore, to justify frequent trips into town, shopping, appointments, business transactions and kindergarten had to be planned appropriately. One parent stated that "our child only attends kindy once or twice a week, because we live 15 kilometers away on a farm." Another parent commented, "that we live out of town, and we have two younger children still at home."

Lack of confidence

Sixteen parents perceived that they lacked the confidence necessary to be more involved. A major barrier for lack of confidence appeared to incorporate the fact that there was also a lack of communication. One parent commented, "If I was asked, I would probably help, especially if my help was appreciated." Other comments were "maybe an invitation to parents would bring a sense of belonging and not intruding," or "I do not

know the right thing to do." Many such comments indicated that parents were looking for guidance and reinforcement from the teaching staff. Comments such as "tell me if I am doing the right thing," "build parent confidence," "use everyday language," "invite parents to join activities," "ask parents for suggestions about what could be done," suggest that parents are unsure about how to assist their children and how to become involved in learning activities. From this sixteen, 10 also mentioned younger children. Each of these sixteen parents listed more than one barrier.

Sub-problem 4.2 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by reception and year one parents?

Forty four percent of reception and year one parents did not list any barriers that prevented them from being involved in their children's education.

The responses received from the other 56% of junior primary parents are listed in order of frequency of mention: younger children (52), work commitments (51), lack of confidence (36), lack of time (24), and distance to travel (20).

Younger children

Of the fifty two parents who indicated that having younger children prevented them becoming more involved, 11 also mentioned working commitments and 6 had a distance to travel. One parent commented, "as we live 17 miles away from school and have working commitments, I find it difficult to spend as much time at the school as I would like. I would be glad to go to committee meetings and on canteen rosters when I don't have small children to take!" Another commented "I don't have the time because I work, to spread myself thinly between three children outside the home environment." and "a creche is important if parents are to participate." Twenty parents perceived that younger children were their only barrier.

Work commitments

Fifty one parents indicated that work commitments prevented them from being more involved in their children's education. Eight also indicated a lack of time and eighteen

mentioned younger children as being a barrier. Some comments indicated that " there are no night time activities, so fathers can go," and "working parents cannot go to open days and work shops because they are during the day." Another parent said "if there was child care and the meetings were at night, I could go"," while another parent said, "I have five children and I help my husband of the farm."

Lack of confidence

Of the 36 parents who indicated a lack of confidence, 21 perceived it to be the only barrier. Seven parents also mentioned not having time and 4 indicated that work commitments prevented them from becoming more involved. Some parent comments include, "I haven't got time and I don't know how," "education methods have changed too much and I haven't got time," "I have working commitments and I lack knowledge about education. It has changed in the last 10 years. Besides, will teachers approve of the way I do it?"

Other comments that suggest that parents are unsure about how they can assist their children and how they can become involved in school activities, include "more social gatherings for parents to meet so they will feel more at ease when attending functions, instead of thinking 'but I don't know anyone" or "treat parents as equals, do not listen to gossip, or go on parents' social standard," "I feel as if I am interfering," "encourage parents to become involved, no matter how little they may be able to give," also indicate that parents are looking for reinforcement and personal encouragement from teachers.

Lack of time

Twenty four parents indicated lack of time as a barrier and 6 of these parents also mentioned lack of confidence and/or younger children, while 4 mentioned distance. One parent commented, "My husband and I don't have time because we have a small business and we have four younger children." Other comments indicated "personal lack of time," "community commitments and younger children," "too busy and I play sport," "I am too

busy and I am not as educated as children are today. Teachers look down on me" as being barriers that prevented parents from being more involved.

Distance to travel

Of the 20 parents who listed distance to travel as a barrier, 6 also listed work commitments and 4 mentioned that they did not have time. One parent pointed out that because the meetings and parent interviews are at night, "children getting off a school bus are expected back at the school in 1 or 2 hours. Parents haven't time to re-organize work commitments." Another parent stated, "we have young children and I do not have the time as I have to travel 20 miles to the school."

Sub-problem 4.3 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by teachers?

As shown in Table 8, nine of the ten kindergarten teachers suggested that parents' lack of confidence was the major barrier that prevented more parent involvement. Similarly, lack of confidence and work commitments were the two major barriers perceived by junior primary teachers.

Table 8

Teachers perception of barriers relating to parent involvement

Barriers	Kindergarten teachers (N=10)		Others (N=17)
Lack of confidence	9		10
Work commitment	4		10
Young children	3		6
Lack of time	2		4
Distance from kdgn/school	0		0
Number of barriers	18	Number of barriers	30

Summary

Kindergarten, reception and year one teachers rated parents' lack of confidence as the major barrier associated with parent involvement in early childhood education, while parents saw younger children and work commitments as being the two major barriers. Of the five most common barriers, lack of confidence was mentioned least frequently by parents. Both groups of teachers were aware of the constraint of work on parent involvement. Because of the structure of the kindergarten environment, kindergarten teachers may perceive younger children to be less of a constraint. While 40 parents mentioned distance, no teacher mentioned distance as a barrier.

Problem 5 What suggestions to improve parent involvement in early childhood education were identified by parents and teachers?

The suggestions that were made by parents and teachers to improve parent involvement in early childhood education indicated that increased professional and social parent/teacher interaction would be beneficial. However, suggestions by the parents indicated that positive action should be taken to involve them in the early childhood education of their children. While teacher suggestions seemed to be more passive and tentative.

Sub-problem 5.1 What suggestions to improve parent involvement did parents identify?

Kindergarten, reception and year one parents gave many suggestions which focussed on general interaction between parent/teacher that would encourage parents to be more involved in their children's education. They suggested that kindergartens/schools should "assist parents to realize the importance of their child's education and how they can contribute to the well being of the schools operation" and included specific ideas such as, "hold parent discussion nights and more open days to view childrens' work and behavior," "teachers inviting and welcoming parents to participate" and "let parents know what children are to learn in junior primary years, so they can help at home." It can be assumed

that these parents are looking to be involved and informed about all aspects of their childrens' education.

Sub-problem 5.2 What suggestions to improve parental involvement did teachers identify?

Kindergarten, reception and year one teachers gave many suggestions which might enhance parent involvement. Seven of the ten kindergarten teachers included statements such as "create an open door policy," "be a welcoming center where parents can come without any threat to their knowledge, actions, or interests. Be a part of the environment and join in at their own level." "Offer more social get togethers and child/parent nights, to enable parents to get to know each other and increase their confidence in what they are doing." Seven of the seventeen reception and year one teachers also stressed the need for "curriculum nights for parents," "more subject workshops, e.g., math and language, more open days, workshops and parent information groups" and "informal social activities to relax and inform parents on teaching practices."

Teachers were also concerned that parents not detract from their program. A kindergarten teacher said, "sometimes too much involvement can be detrimental to the child. The main need is for staff to know the parents and children and make it known to the parents if more or less involvement is desirable." Here the sensitivity to the child's needs was seen as the deciding factor, while for another teacher there was a potential threat to the philosophy and program in the classroom. "I feel there is a limit of course, to the amount of parent involvement in a classroom situation, and I guess school - too much can be dangerous and cause problems between parents and teachers. The 'right' sort of parents and parent help is great though!"

Summary

Parents and teachers suggested that to improve parent involvement in early childhood education more parent/teacher interaction, and social as well as organized workshop type activities were necessary.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of actual and preferred parent involvement in the early childhood education years, as perceived by parents and teachers. This study sought to know the extent to which parents are presently involved in their children's education, how much involvement they would prefer and what were barriers to parent involvement for them. To fulfill the study purpose, parents of children in six kindergarten centers and six reception and year one classes from the Yorke region of South Australia were selected to investigate the following specific problems.

1. To what extent were there differences in actual parent involvement in early childhood education as perceived by parents?

2. To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by teachers?

3. To what extent were there differences between parents and teachers on parent involvement in early childhood education?

4. What barriers to parent involvement were identified by parents and teachers.

5. What suggestions to improve parent involvement in early childhood education were identified by parents and teachers?

Justification for the study

There have been few studies of how parents perceive their actual involvement in early childhood education. This study has identified and described sources of actual and preferred parent involvement in early childhood for a group of parents and teachers from the Yorke region of South Australia. As such, this study contributes information about parent perceptions of actual and preferred involvement in early childhood education that was not available in the literature, while incorporating previous research.

Conceptual framework

Initially Gordon's model (1969) served as the basic conceptual framework for the study. According to this wheel shaped model, the parent involvement level was identified by spokes which categorized the extent of involvement based on a scale of classroom involvement. For the purpose of this study, the categories were parents as recipients and supporters, parents as educators, parents as non-instructional volunteers and parents as instructional volunteers.

As the research for this study unfolded, it became evident that Gordon's model was too restrictive, as it did not allow for specific underlying patterns of relationships and dimensions that have become predominantly associated with parent involvement in early childhood since 1974. Gordon's rationale for parent involvement, which sought to change the parent rather than the school, was not compatible with the theories of Deer (1980), Long (1986), Berger (1986), Builder (1986) or programs that have been introduced into the South Australian system, such as Parent Effectiveness Training (PET), Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), or Basic Learning in Primary Schools (BLIPS).

Therefore, a factor analysis was used to determine the common themes from a taxonomy of items based on the original four levels devised from Gordon's model. From the data, eight factors were identified: attending at school, assisting with children, talking with the teacher, home support, assisting the teacher, attending learning workshops, helping with resources and friendship with teacher. These factors do not duplicate Gordon's categories, but rather suggest a classification based on whether the activities are kindergarten, school or classroom based, child or teacher focussed and helping or learning based.

Respondents

The respondents in the study consisted of three hundred and seventy parents whose children attended kindergarten, reception or year one classes and ten kindergarten and seventeen junior primary teachers, all from the Yorke region of South Australia. Each of

these people volunteered to participate in the study, after a letter explaining the purpose and benefits of the study had been sent to them by the researcher. The response rate for the study was 66% for parents and 79% for teachers.

Research methodology

A survey questionnaire was used to gather relevant data to explore the five problems relating to actual and preferred parent involvement as perceived by the parent and teachers. Three separate questionnaires were designed, one for kindergarten parents, one for reception and year one parents and one for kindergarten and junior primary teachers.

The questionnaire responses served to obtain specific demographic information from parents and teachers that were relevant to the sub-problems of problem one, to identify how parents and teachers perceived their actual and preferred involvement in early childhood education, to identify the major barriers as perceived by parents and teachers, and to provide parents and teachers with the opportunity to suggest ideas that could improve parent involvement in early childhood education in the kindergartens and reception and year one classes.

When t-tests were used to compare parent and teacher actual and preferred responses it was discovered that for every item, regardless of category, parents preferred to be more involved and teachers preferred parents to be more involved. Each item indicated a statistically significant difference between actual and preferred levels of involvement. Therefore throughout the study only the related findings of the actual involvement as perceived by parents and teachers were discussed.

Summary of the findings

The major objectives of the study were achieved through the examination of the five major problems and related sub-problems. The problem statements were derived from the conceptual framework of the study and the review of the related literature. Each problem is re-stated below with a summary of the major related findings.

Research problem 1: To what extent were there differences in parent involvement in early childhood education as perceived by parents?

1.1. To what extent were there differences in parent involvement in early childhood education programs as perceived by kindergarten, reception and year one parents?

Responses showed that for each parent group, when attending at school, talking with the teacher, offering home support, assisting the teacher, helping with resources and having a parent friendship with the teacher, the difference was not significant. While kindergarten parents indicated more involvement assisting with children, reception and year one parent responses indicated more involvement in attending learning workshops.

1.2 To what extent were there differences in actual parent involvement of working parents and at-home parents?

The significant differences showed that parents who do work tend to be more involved in attending learning workshops and have a stronger friendship with the teacher than parents who are at-home.

1.3 To what extent were there differences in actual parent involvement when pre-kindergarten children were considered?

Parents without pre-kindergarten children were more involved in attending learning workshops. Parent responses indicated that for the seven other factors, pre-kindergarten children did not create a significant difference in actual parent involvement.

1.4 To what extent were there differences in actual parent involvement when the education level of parent respondents was considered?

Parent respondents who had achieved more than a high school education were significantly more involved in attending at school, assisting with children, assisting the teacher, attending learning workshops and having the friendship of the teacher. There was no significant difference in talking with the teacher, home support and helping with resources when the levels of achieved education were considered.

Research problem 2: To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by teachers?

2.1 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by kindergarten, reception and year one teachers?

Kindergarten teachers perceived that parents were actually more significantly involved in assisting with children, talking with the teacher, helping with resources and having a teacher friendship. Reception and year one teachers perceived that parents' home support was more significant. There was no significant difference between the two groups of teachers regarding attending at kindergarten/school, assisting the teacher or attending learning workshops.

2.2 To what extent were there differences in parent involvement as perceived by teachers with varying years of experience?

No clusters were evident, therefore this sub-problem could not be addressed.

Research problem 3: To what extent were there differences between parents and teachers in parent involvement in early childhood education?

Teachers perceived parents to be actually more significantly involved in attending at kindergarten or school, assisting the teacher, helping with resources and having teacher friendship. Parents perceived they were more significantly involved in home support and there was no significant difference between parent and teacher perception of actual involvement in assisting children, talking with the teacher, and attending learning workshops.

Research problem 4: What barriers to parent involvement were identified by parents and teachers?

Kindergarten, reception and year one parents identified the same five barriers; younger children, work commitments, lack of time, distance to travel and lack of confidence.

4.1 What were the barriers to parent involvement as perceived by kindergarten parents?

Five factors in the following order, were perceived to be the major barriers to involvement for kindergarten parents: 1. younger children, 2. work commitments, 3. lack of time, 4. distance to travel to the kindergarten or school and 5. lack of confidence.

4.2 What were the barriers to parent involvement as perceived by reception and year one parents?

Reception and year one parents perceived the barriers that prevented them from being more involved in early childhood education to be chronologically the same as the kindergarten parents did. Younger children, work commitments, lack of time, distance to travel and lack of confidence.

4.3 What barriers to parent involvement were identified by teachers?

Teachers identified 1. lack of confidence, 2. work commitments, 3. younger children and 4. lack of time as being the barriers that prevented parents from being more involved in early childhood education.

Research problem 5: What suggestions to improve parent involvement in early childhood education were identified by parents and teachers?

Parent suggestions indicated that they needed positive reinforcement from the teachers and teacher suggestions indicated that open door policies and more work shops for parents would improve parent involvement in early childhood education.

Discussion of the findings in relation to the literature

In South Australia during the 1980's action was endorsed to enable parent involvement to become a positive undertaking (Deer;1980; ELIC, 1984; Burke, 1985; PASS, 1986).

In this study eight factors identified categories of parent involvement each of which can be identified with the three processes of Rathbone and Graham's model (1981) which was illustrated in the review of literature. The three processes are peripheral involvement, collaboration and partnership and this process included the range of parents being involved in home support, attending at school, through to assisting the teacher, or attending learning

workshops, to helping with resources or forming friendships with the teacher. A major finding of this study was that for parents actual involvement was peripheral.

Kindergarten, reception and year one teachers, perceived that the actual involvement of parents was in assisting children, talking with the teacher, home support, helping with resources and forming a teacher friendship. These factors incorporate the collaboration and partnership process of Rathbone and Graham's model (1981).

This study revealed that while researchers such as Morrison (1978), Deer (1980), Cullingford (1985), Berger (1986), conclude that parent/teacher support enhanced child development or that more harmony between parents and teachers was important for the child, this parent/teacher support may not be occurring in the actual learning situation.

The success of any parent involvement venture depends very largely on the attitudes of the teacher putting it into operation. Prosser (1981) indicated that when a teacher has "to share professional expertise and 'put it up for scrutiny' there is a call for radical reappraisal of traditional attitudes" (p. 22). It is the teachers that need the skills to continually reach out to parents with warmth and sensitivity and devise opportunities for parents to become involved in ways that they the parents perceive as practical and meaningful. In the past teachers have not been trained in people skills that involved any kind of interaction with parents. In recent years however, Bell (1981), William & Stallworth, (1982) and Burke (1985) have all indicated that a number of observers advocate such training as an integral part of teacher preparation.

The findings of this study revealed that parents acknowledge, but accept the barriers of young children, work commitments, lack of time and the distance they may have to travel. These barriers are a result of their own actions and circumstances and in no way the fault of the kindergarten or school. However, parents are looking for positive reinforcement and professional interaction from teachers that will enable them to gain the confidence and expertise they feel they need so as to be more beneficial to their childrens' early childhood education. One parent stated, "I feel helpless against the education system, which

encourages mediocrity. I do not believe my child's educational potential is being realized, or his interest stimulated in the present system and I feel powerless to change it."

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study and the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and study context.

1. The majority of kindergarten, reception and year one parents perceive they are actually involved in early childhood education. The main areas of parent involvement are in areas that relate to the factors attending at school, talking with the teacher and fulfilling home support activities. Kindergarten, reception and year one parents are especially seeking more involvement in areas that include interacting with and assisting the teacher, being involved with some aspect of the learning and helping with resources. Fantini (1980) referred to parents at this stage as being "producer-related," they are active productive participants within the learning situation. Parents seem tentative about always forming a friendship with the teacher and comments like "teachers are really too busy to become too involved with parents and parents are feeling alienated by this," or "teachers know best, they are paid to do it" seem to reinforce the fact that the majority of parents lack the confidence to perceive they are vitally significant in the education of their children and the teachers' equal. One mother said "treat me like his mother, the one that DOES know him best!" The preferred responses to the questions relating to these factors, listed in the second section of the survey indicate this.

2. The majority of kindergarten, reception and year one teachers perceive that parents are actually more involved in the factors that contain items pertaining to assisting children, talking with the teacher, being involved in home support , helping with resources and a friendship with the teacher. These perceptions are the opposite of the parents'. One teacher spoke for the majority of the other teachers that "the 'right' sort of parents and parent help is great!" This could indicate that if a teacher has the 'right' sort of parent, whether it be three or ten parents, the teacher's perception is that parents are actually

involved. While teachers would hesitate to play favorites with children, they seem to show less reticence in working with parents.

3. Parents and teachers are becoming more aware that there needs to be close liaison between the home and the kindergarten or school, so that the teacher can build upon the acquired knowledge that the child may already have. Evidence from parent responses throughout this study, indicated that parents assume that it is the role of the teacher to initiate the liaison. "It's the staffs' job, they get paid to do it," or "they are far more suited for the job, it's up to them." It seems that once children begin their early childhood education, parents feel that their role is to follow the teacher's lead, rather than continue to use their own expertise.

4. Parents are ready to provide active and producer-related input into early childhood education. Educators and administrators in South Australia are offering programs such as ELIC, and BLIPS, to provide teachers and parents with the opportunity to acquire necessary interpersonal skills and the confidence to be able to take part in decisions that affect areas related to curriculum, policy, class philosophy, goals and administrative procedures. Such programs will encourage interested parents to join the learning program.

In February of 1988 Children's Service Office conducted a survey of parents about early childhood education at the kindergarten level. Questions posed to parents included: "What should Children's Services be striving to do?" "How can kindergartens provide programs to meet changing community needs?" "How do you think Children's Services should be provided to meet your needs?" The responses received will be collated and the recommendations forwarded to the Minister of Education after April 1988.

Implications

Implications of the study for early childhood educators and researchers who are interested in pursuing the effectiveness of parent involvement as an important factor in early childhood education are as follows.

Factors identified and described as a result of responses by both parents and teachers, indicate that more parent involvement would be preferred by both parents and teachers. Parents would prefer a more collaborative role of involvement that included opportunities to gain an understanding of child development, present teaching methods and curriculum content. They want to gain specific skills in order to fulfill a support role in the kindergarten or school, to attend learning workshops so as to develop more effective parenting and decision making skills, and they are anxious to discover and develop personal abilities and interests that will be of benefit to them as parents and educators of their children. Teacher responses reinforced parents in these issues. Christofis (1981) said

> that teachers need to acknowledge that a partnership with parents is not an abdication of one's professional leadership role. It is, on the contrary, an opportunity to understand parents' interest, needs, goals and expectations and to share with them information about current curriculum and methodology" (p. 12).

Teachers who acknowledged this opportunity, would therefore be building parent confidence and breaking down the major barrier as they perceive it.

One major diffculty experienced by parents and teachers with regard to their perception of parent involvement, is that both parents and teachers are at different stages of development and have differing needs at a given time. It can be seen that the majority of parents in this study work, or are very busy with younger children. For parent involvement to be purposeful and productive, the needs of as many parents as possible need to be met. This indicates that teachers need to feel comfortable and have the skills necessary to explore with parents the aims they wish to accomplish for the benefit of the child. Parent involvement in kindergartens and schools could therefore be measured in terms of the teacher's stage of development at a particular time. Teachers insinuated that as professionals, they need the opportunity to acquire the confidence to share their professional expertise and establish parent/teacher friendships for more effective parent involvement. Teachers need to feel comfortable with the dimensions and type of

involvement that is occurring, which is for the most part dependent on the teachers' personal attitudes, perception of self and the preferences for how the teacher and the parent want the involvement to be. Consideration should therefore be given to providing more opportunities for teachers and parents to participate together in relevant inservice conferences.

The best time for teachers to acquire skills relating to parent interaction, is at pre-service level. Teachers Colleges could provide for the development of interpersonal and communication skills, and the opportunity of working with parents from within a community which would enable teachers to develop a positive attitude about the necessity of parent involvement.

Concluding comments

Morrison (1978) stated that "parent involvement is a process of actualizing the potential of parents; of helping parents discover their strengths, potentialities and talents and of using them for the benefit of themselves and the family " (p. 22).

An example that epitomizes the above statement is shown in a summary of a school council workshop held at a school in the Yorke region (Yorke Peninsula Country Times, 1987).

> Parents participated in a workshop assessing and reporting on children's learning at school, in a culmination of two terms' work by school staff and Yorke District consultants. During Term 2, the consultants collected information from parents, students and staff on their perception of assessment and reporting, by interviews, observation of classroom work, looking at teachers' records, and keeping diaries of assessed work.
>
> The information was collated and presented to school staff early in Term 3, and teachers were then able to focus on how to report children's progress to parents. A policy in draft form was devised, taking into account many of the views of parents.

> The workshop was devised to give parents feed back on the information gathered. Part of the evening involved parents in assessing pieces of children's writing, and providing opportunities for group discussion on how work is assessed and reported on.
>
> The evening concluded with a response by teachers to the findings of the evaluation, and a presentation to the council of the school assessment and reporting policy. (p. 7).

Sebastian (1986) revealed "there is a swing away from the organizational approach which relied so heavily on the use of professional expertise and knowledge, and which viewed parents and children as clients or recipients of services" (p. 77). The Children's Services Office and the South Australian Education Department are demonstrating positive attitudes towards parent involvement in early childhood education. Opportunities are becoming more readily available for parents to gain expertise that will enable them to become as Sebastian (1986) said, "partners and collaborators" (p. 77) with the teachers in the early childhood education of their children.

TABLES

Table 9
Kindergarten Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 1							
Attending at kindergarten							
Do you help with fundraising?	A	33.5	35.6	18.6	7.4	4.8	188
	P	42.2	39.5	12.4	2.7	3.2	185
Do you attend open days?	A	28.3	32.1	21.4	9.6	8.6	187
	P	43.5	37.5	11.4	3.3	4.3	184
Do you attend kinder-garten meetings?	A	15.5	17.6	17.6	18.7	30.5	187
	P	28.3	33.7	24.5	5.4	8.2	184
Do you attend P/Tr. interviews?	A	42.5	13.8	17.2	7.5	19.0	174
	P	52.6	24.6	14.6	2.3	5.8	171
Do you volunteer for busy bees?	A	13.9	21.9	32.6	12.3	19.3	187
	P	15.2	38.6	36.4	4.3	5.4	184

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 10
Kindergarten Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 2							
Assisting with children							
Do you visit your child's center?	A	13.3	30.3	38.8	14.9	2.7	188
	P	18.9	56.8	19.5	3.8	.1.1	185
Do you supervise chn in the playground?	A	1.6	8.0	28.9	18.7	42.8	187
	P	2.7	14.6	50.3	14.1	18.4	185
Do you correct chn's work in the center?	A	2.7	10.2	24.7	18.3	44.1	186
	P	6.6	14.3	34.6	15.4	29.1	182

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 11
Kindergarten Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 3							
Talking with the teacher							
Does tr. help you under stand tchg. methods?	A	17.1	29.4	29.9	14.4	9.1	187
	P	39.9	36.1	21.3	1.1	1.6	183
Do you get a choice of involvement?	A	27.3	25.7	28.9	9.6	8.6	187
	P	38.6	33.2	26.1	.5	1.6	184
Does tr. keep you informed on child?	A	30.5	28.9	23.0	10.7	7.0	187
	P	52.7	37.9	7.7	.5	1.1	182

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 12
Kindergarten Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 4							
Home support							
Do you respond to newsletters?	A	66.7	21.5	11.3	.5	-	186
	P	75.4	20.2	3.3	1.1	-	183
Do you return requests for material?	A	48.9	31.4	12.2	3.7	3.7	188
	P	60.0	28.1	8.6	1.1	2.2	185
Does your involvement help child?	A	67.6	14.9	14.4	2.7	.5	188
	P	74.2	15.4	9.3	.5	.5	182
Do you help with child's homework?	A	37.2	39.9	19.7	3.2	-	188
	P	56.8	36.8	4.9	1.6	-	185

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 13
Kindergarten Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 5							
Assisting the teacher							
Do you go on kdgn. excursions?	A	12.4	15.7	32.4	16.8	22.7	185
	P	23.0	37.7	27.9	4.9	6.6	183
Do you organize interest centers?	A	-	2.2	7.0	10.8	80.0	185
	P	1.1	10.4	34.4	17.5	36.6	183
Do you teach indiv. children?	A	1.1	3.2	15.0	9.6	71.1	187
	P	4.3	8.1	40.0	17.3	30.3	185
Do you assist in story-telling & craft activities?	A	3.2	5.9	25.3	17.7	47.8	186
	P	5.5	20.2	47.5	14.8	12.0	183

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 14
Kindergarten Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 6							
Attending learning workshops							
Do you offer Tr. ideas & suggestions?	A	2.7	1.6	15.4	16.5	63.8	188
	P	3.8	10.3	37.5	17.9	30.4	184
Do you attend work shops for parents?	A	5.5	7.2	12.7	17.7	56.9	181
	P	6.7	21.3	39.3	12.4	20.2	178
Are there extra-curricular activities?	A	3.7	15.0	39.3	16.8	25.2	107
	P	13.6	29.1	39.8	3.9	13.6	103

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 15
Kindergarten Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 7							
Helping with resources							
Do you make equipment for the center?	A	.5	4.3	9.1	21.0	65.1	186
	P	3.3	13.0	50.0	14.1	19.6	184
Do you file resource material?	A	-	2.7	3.7	6.9	86.7	188
	P	1.6	5.4	34.4	8.6	50.0	186

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 16
Kindergarten Parents' Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 8							
Friendship with teacher							
Does the tr. visit your home?	A	.5	.5	4.3	3.2	91.4	186
	P	.5	3.3	30.8	18.1	47.3	182
Do you do typing for the kindergarten?	A	-	2.1	5.9	3.2	88.8	187
	P	1.1	8.1	24.9	9.2	56.8	185

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 17
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 1							
Attending at school							
Do you help with fundraising?	A	21.7	35.0	26.7	10.0	6.7	60
	P	33.9	35.6	30.5	-	-	59
Do you attend open days?	A	41.7	46.7	6.7	1.7	3.3	60
	P	66.7	30.0	1.7	1.7	-	60
Do you attend school council?	A	9.8	13.1	23.0	24.6	29.5	61
	P	18.6	45.8	27.1	3.4	5.1	59
Do you attend P/Tr interviews?	A	68.3	20.0	5.0	-	6.7	60
	P	81.7	15.0	-	-	3.3	60
Do you volunteer for canteen etc?	A	8.5	20.3	32.2	16.9	22.0	59
	P	10.3	22.4	48.3	8.6	10.3	58

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 18
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 2							
Assisting with children							
Do you visit your child's classroom?	A	3.3	11.7	43.3	23.2	18.3	60
	P	6.7	55.0	36.7	1.7	-	60
Do you supervise chn in the playground?	A	1.7	1.7	1.7	-	94.9	59
	P	1.7	5.1	23.7	16.9	52.5	59
Do you correct chn's work in class?	A	-	1.7	1.7	1.7	94.9	59
	P	-	5.1	27.1	13.6	54.2	59

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 19
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 3							
Talking with the teacher							
Does tr. help you understand tchg. methods?	A	18.6	25.4	30.5	16.9	8.5	59
	P	32.8	41.4	22.4	3.4	-	58
Do you get a choice of involvement?	A	16.7	10.0	30.0	16.7	26.7	60
	P	19.3	38.6	31.6	5.3	5.3	57
Does tr. keep you informed on child?	A	39.0	20.3	22.0	13.6	5.1	59
	P	63.8	34.5	-	1.7	-	58

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 20
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 4							
Home support							
Do you respond to newsletters?	A	80.0	13.3	5.0	1.7	-	60
	P	85.0	11.7	3.3	-	-	60
Do you return requests for material?	A	65.5	25.9	6.9	1.7	-	58
	P	69.5	25.4	5.1	-	-	59
Do you help with child's homework?	A	47.5	39.0	10.2	1.7	1.7	59
	P	54.4	35.1	8.8	-	1.8	57
Does your involvement help child?	A	50.8	27.1	15.3	6.8	-	59
	P	61.0	27.1	8.5	1.7	1.7	59

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 21
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 5							
Assisting the teacher							
Do you go on class excursions?	A	4.9	21.3	27.9	14.8	31.1	61
	P	12.1	41.4	36.2	5.2	5.2	58
Do you organize interest centers?	A	-	1.7	6.8	11.9	79.7	59
	P	-	6.9	51.7	20.7	20.7	58
Do you teach individual children?	A	10.0	13.3	11.7	13.3	51.7	60
	P	8.6	27.6	43.1	12.1	8.6	58
Do you assist in story-telling & craft activities?	A	5.1	3.4	22.0	18.6	50.8	59
	P	5.1	16.9	42.4	16.9	18.6	59

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 22
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 6							
Attending learning workshops							
Do you offer Tr. ideas & suggestions?	A	-	-	10.2	22.0	67.8	59
	P	-	3.4	46.6	22.4	27.6	58
Do you attend work shops for parents?	A	13.6	6.8	13.6	10.2	55.9	59
	P	19.0	10.3	48.3	6.9	15.5	58
Are there extra-curricula activities?	A	6.5	6.1	30.3	24.2	33.3	33
	P	8.6	31.4	45.7	5.7	8.6	35

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 23
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 7							
Helping with resources							
Do you make equipment	A	3.3	3.3	11.5	24.6	57.4	61
for the class room?	P	1.7	17.2	44.8	15.5	20.7	58
Do you file resource	A	-	-	6.8	5.1	88.1	59
material?	P	-	1.7	39.0	16.9	42.4	59

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 24
Reception Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 8							
Friendship with teacher							
Does the teacher visit	A	-	3.3	3.3	6.7	86.7	60
your home?	P	-	5.1	47.5	16.9	30.5	59
Do you do typing for	A	-	3.4	-	-	96.6	59
class use?	P	-	3.4	30.5	13.6	52.5	59

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 25
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 1 Attending at school							
Do you help with fundraising?	A	24.0	32.0	29.3	8.0	6.7	75
	P	26.7	44.0	20.0	2.7	6.7	75
Do you attend open days?	A	38.7	37.3	17.3	4.0	2.7	75
	P	59.5	32.4	6.8	-	1.4	74
Do you attend school meetings?	A	8.0	17.3	14.7	22.7	37.3	75
	P	17.3	42.7	26.7	4.0	9.3	75
Do you attend P/Tr interviews?	A	60.0	22.7	8.0	6.7	2.7	75
	P	74.3	16.2	5.4	2.7	1.4	74
Do you volunteer for canteen etc?	A	9.3	12.0	26.7	20.0	32.0	75
	P	12.0	22.7	34.7	17.3	13.3	75

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 26
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Items		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 2 Assisting with children							
Do you visit your child's classroom?	A	2.7	14.9	37.8	24.3	20.3	74
	P	14.9	36.5	39.2	4.1	5.4	74
Do you supervise chn in the playground?	A	-	1.3	1.3	5.3	92.0	75
	P	1.4	6.8	23.0	8.1	60.8	74
Do you correct chn's work in class?	A	-	1.4	1.4	5.4	91.9	74
	P	-	6.8	13.7	5.5	74.0	73

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 27
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 3							
Talking with the teacher							
Does tr. help you understand tchg. methods?	A	22.7	22.7	36.0	12.0	6.7	73
	P	37.0	37.0	21.9	4.1	-	73
Do you get a choice of involvement?	A	20.0	9.3	25.3	18.7	26.7	75
	P	25.7	21.6	32.4	8.1	12.2	74
Does tr. keep you informed on child?	A	41.3	30.7	17.3	10.7	-	75
	P	64.9	29.7	4.1	1.4	-	74

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 28
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 4							
Home support							
Do you respond to newsletters?	A	76.0	17.3	5.3	1.3	-	75
	P	86.5	8.1	5.4	-	-	74
Do you return requests for material?	A	61.3	22.7	10.7	4.0	1.3	75
	P	67.6	23.0	8.1	1.4	-	74
Do you help with child's homework?	A	52.0	26.7	17.3	2.7	1.3	75
	P	55.4	29.7	13.5	1.4	-	74
Does your involvement help child?	A	53.3	13.3	29.3	2.7	1.3	75
	P	62.2	18.9	17.6	1.4	-	74

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 29
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Items		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 5							
Assisting the teacher							
Do you go on class excursions?	A	5.3	16.0	20.0	16.0	42.7	75
	P	10.7	30.7	38.7	9.3	10.7	75
Do you organize interest centers?	A	2.7	2.7	5.3	14.7	74.7	75
	P	4.0	10.7	28.0	13.3	44.0	75
Do you teach indiv. children?	A	2.7	12.0	14.7	16.0	54.7	75
	P	6.7	25.3	38.7	4.0	25.3	75
Do you assist in story-telling & craft activities?	A	1.3	5.3	12.0	18.7	62.7	75
	P	4.1	13.5	37.8	10.8	33.8	74

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 30
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 6							
Attending learning workshops							
Do you offer Tr. ideas & suggestions?	A	-	-	9.3	28.0	62.7	75
	P	1.4	9.5	29.7	20.3	39.2	74
Do you attend work shops for parents?	A	4.1	9.5	16.2	16.2	54.1	74
	P	8.2	26.0	26.0	8.2	31.5	73
Are there extra-curricula activities?	A	7.8	13.7	29.4	19.6	29.4	51
	P	18.4	28.6	22.4	12.2	18.4	49

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 31
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 7							
Helping with resources							
Do you make equipment for the class room?	A	5.3	2.7	17.3	13.3	61.3	75
	P	6.7	8.0	42.7	16.0	26.7	75
Do you file resource material?	A	1.3	-	10.7	5.3	82.7	75
	P	1.3	5.3	28.0	5.3	60.0	75

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 32
Year One Parents' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 8							
Friendship with teacher							
Does the tr. visit your home?	A	-	1.3	10.7	4.0	84.0	75
	P	-	4.0	46.7	10.7	38.7	75
Do you do typing for the classroom?	A	-	1.3	8.0	4.0	86.7	75
	P	-	10.7	24.0	6.7	58.7	75

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 33
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors .

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 1							
Attending at school							
Do parents help with fundraising?	A	3.7	51.9	33.3	7.4	3.7	27
	P	40.7	44.4	14.8	-	-	27
Do parents attend open days?	A	7.4	55.6	29.6	7.4	-	27
	P	55.6	44.4	-	-	-	27
Do parents attend kdgn/ school meetings?	A	-	33.3	29.6	37.0	-	27
	P	37.0	63.0	-	-	-	27
Do parents attend P/Tr interviews?	A	4.0	56.0	24.0	12.0	4.0	25
	P	48.0	44.0	8.0	-	-	25
Do parents volunteer for canteen & busy-bees?	A	-	11.1	11.1	25.9	51.9	27
	P	3.7	18.5	29.6	33.3	14.8	27

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 34
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Parent Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 2							
Assisting with children							
Do parents visit your center/ classroom?	A	-	18.5	37.0	29.6	14.8	27
	P	11.1	40.7	44.4	3.7	-	27
Do parents supervise chn in playground?	A	-	-	18.5	14.8	66.7	27
	P	-	-	14.8	22.2	63.0	27
Do parents correct chn's work?	A	-	3.7	14.8	44.4	37.0	27
	P	14.8	7.4	48.1	3.7	25.9	27

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 35
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Parent Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 3 Talking with the teacher							
Do you help parents understand tchg methods?	A	-	29.6	59.3	11.1	-	27
	P	11.1	63.0	22.2	3.7	-	27
Do parents get a choice of involvement?	A	3.7	18.5	70.4	7.4	-	27
	P	14.8	55.6	25.9	3.7	-	27
Are parents kept informed on child's progress?	A	25.9	48.1	25.9	-	-	27
	P	40.7	55.6	3.7	-	-	27

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 36
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Parent Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 4 Home support							
Do parents respond to newsletters?	A	11.1	70.4	14.8	3.7	-	27
	P	81.5	18.5	-	-	-	27
Do parents return requests for material?	A	-	59.3	25.9	14.8	-	27
	P	37.0	51.9	11.1	-	-	27
Does parent involvement help child?	A	48.1	25.9	22.2	3.7	-	27
	P	73.1	19.2	7.7	-	-	26
Do parents help with homework?	A	-	44.0	36.0	16.0	4.0	25
	P	16.0	52.0	28.0	-	4.0	25

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 37
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Parent Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 5							
Assisting the teacher							
Do parents go on kdgn/ class excursions?	A	-	7.4	33.3	40.7	18.5	27
	P	7.4	22.2	48.1	18.5	3.7	27
Do parents organize interest centers?	A	3.7	22.2	29.6	29.6	14.8	27
	P	7.4	29.6	37.0	14.8	11.1	27
Do parents teach individual children?	A	-	19.2	15.4	7.7	57.7	26
	P	3.8	11.5	34.6	11.5	38.5	26
Do parents assist in story-telling & craft activities?	A	-	22.2	29.6	37.0	11.1	27
	P	7.4	25.9	63.0	-	3.7	27

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 38
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Parent Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 6							
Attending learning workshops							
Do parents offer ideas & suggestions?	A	18.5	40.7	37.0	3.7	-	27
	P	22.2	51.9	25.9	-	-	27
Do you organize work-shops for parents?	A	-	11.1	11.1	37.0	40.7	27
	P	3.7	18.5	40.7	33.3	3.7	27
Are extra-curricula parent activities planned?	A	-	14.8	55.6	14.8	14.8	27
	P	11.1	25.9	44.4	11.1	7.4	27

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 39
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Parent Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 7							
Helping with resources							
Do parents make equipment	A	-	7.4	25.9	18.5	48.1	27
for kdgn/class use?	P	3.7	3.7	44.4	18.5	29.6	27
Do parents file resource	A	-	7.4	33.3	22.2	37.0	27
material?	P	11.1	11.1	66.7	7.4	3.7	27

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

Table 40
Teachers' Perception of Actual and Preferred Involvement for Items in the Eight Factors.

Item		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Number
Factor 8							
Friendship with teacher							
Do you organize home visits?	A	-	-	11.1	33.3	55.6	27
	P	14.8	7.4	22.2	37.0	18.5	27
Do parents type for kdgn/	A	3.8	23.1	61.5	11.5	-	26
class use?	P	23.1	38.5	38.5	-	-	26

A = actual involvement, P = preferred involvement.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

PARENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE*

Name: _____ Date: _____
Address: _____ Center: _____
Phone: _____ Child's name: _____

1. In my job as a parent I have the hardest time in:

	Very difficult	*Somewhat difficult*	*No problem*
a. Being an only parent	☐	☐	☐
b. Teaching my child to obey	☐	☐	☐
c. Providing proper nourishment	☐	☐	☐
d. Making time to listen and play with my child	☐	☐	☐
e. Disciplining my child	☐	☐	☐
f. Having patience and understanding	☐	☐	☐
g. Understanding my child's growth	☐	☐	☐
h. Other (specify) _____	☐	☐	☐

2. To do my job better as a parent I would like training in:

	Very important	*Somewhat important*	*Not important*
a. Child growth and development	☐	☐	☐
b. Bilingual-bicultural education	☐	☐	☐
c. Nutrition	☐	☐	☐
d. Child behavior and discipline	☐	☐	☐
e. First aid	☐	☐	☐
f. Self-improvement	☐	☐	☐
g. Home improvement	☐	☐	☐
h. Techniques in working with the handicapped child	☐	☐	☐
i. Other (specify) _____	☐	☐	☐

3. What I expect Head Start to do for my child:
   a. Learn to get along with other children _____
   b. Develop self-confidence _____
   c. Obtain medical and dental screening _____
   d. Other (specify) _____
4. What I expect Head Start to do for me as a parent:
   a. Get to know and understand my child better _____
   b. Become aware of services available for me and my family _____
   c. Develop patience with my child _____
   d. Understand what my child is learning at school and how I can help him at home _____
   e. Get acquainted with teachers and other parents _____
   f. Other (specify) _____

PARENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE—cont'd

5. As a parent, my interest in becoming involved with the Head Start Center is:
   a. ☐ In the classroom working with children
   b. ☐ In decision-making committees
   c. ☐ In working with my child and teacher
6. As a parent my special interests are:
   a. ☐ Working with young children
   b. ☐ Cooking
   c. ☐ Typing
   d. ☐ Working on fund raising activities
   e. ☐ Planning special occasion parties for the children
   f. ☐ Planning parent activities
   g. ☐ Music—playing piano, guitar, other
7. When would be the most convenient time for you to attend parent training and meetings:

	Morning	*Afternoon*	*Evening*
Monday	☐	☐	☐
Tuesday	☐	☐	☐
Wednesday	☐	☐	☐
Thursday	☐	☐	☐
Friday	☐	☐	☐
Weekends	☐	☐	☐

8. At home we speak mostly:
   a. ☐ Engligh
   b. ☐ Spanish
   c. ☐ Both English and Spanish
   d. ☐ Other (specify)
9. Would you prefer parent meetings, workshops, in-service training held in:
   a. ☐ English
   b. ☐ Spanish
10. Which day would be most convenient for you to volunteer to ride the bus or volunteer in the classroom:

	Morning	*Afternoon*
Tuesday	☐	☐
Wednesday	☐	☐
Thursday	☐	☐
Friday	☐	☐

APPENDIX B

SECTION ONE, TWO AND THREE OF PARENT SURVEY

Parent involvement in early childhood education survey.

The home / school relationship is important to a child's education. This study seeks to know the extent to which parents are presently involved in their child's education, how much involvement they would prefer and what the concerns are, relating to parental involvement

The survey is divided into three sections.

Section one	General information.
Section two	Actual and preferred involvement of parents as perceived by parents
Section three	Barriers relating to actual and preferred parental involvement.

SECTION ONE General information

The following information is to be filled in by a parent or adult most involved in the childs' schooling.

1. Have you children in Kindergarten Reception Year One
   Please circle

2. Does your child have younger brothers/sisters? Yes No

3. Does your child have brothers/sisters in Primary school? Yes No
   If so how many? .....

4. If you have children in Primary school, how would you rate your involvement with their early education?
   a. As a Supporter e.g., classroom observer
   b. As an Educator e.g., parent volunteer for classroom activities
   c. As a non-instructional Volunteer e.g., assistant for excursions
   d. As an instructional Volunteer e.g., talking about profession, demonstrating a specific skill such as shearing

   Please circle the appropriate division.

5. Do you work outside the home?
   full time .....
   part time .....
   not at all .....

6. Does your spouse work outside the home?
   full time .....
   part time .....
   not at all .....

7. What is your highest level of education?
   Some High School .....
   Finished High School .....
   Some Tertiary Education .....
   Finished Tertiary Education .....
   University Degree .....

8. I am the child's
   Mother ..... Female Guardian.....
   Father ..... Male Guardian .....
   Grandparent Male..... Grandparent Female.....
   Other please specify .....
   Please tick appropriate relationship

SECTION TWO Actual and preferred involvement

Section two consists of questions relating to actual involvement (1st line) and preferred involvement (2nd line). Reflect on how much you have been involved in your childs' classroom over the past year, and indicate with a circle how you see it to be. Indicate how you would prefer this involvement to be on line two.

The Scale:

A: Always	O: Often	ST: Sometimes	S: Seldom	N: Never
Always = 100%	Often = 75%	Sometimes = 50%	Seldom = 25%	Never = Nil

An Example:

Do you visit your child's classroom to observe lessons?

actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

The circled response on the first line, indicates that you in actual fact seldom visit the classroom. The circled response from the second line, indicates that you would prefer to visit the classroom often.

If you wish to add comments to these responses, please use the space provided under each question.

There are many ways in which you can be involved in your childs' education. For each of the following please indicate how you would rate your participation.

Do you respond to newsletters and notices that are sent home?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you help in fund-raising e.g , street stalls, raffle tickets, cabarets or other such activities??
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you attend public activities e.g ,book week, parent nights, open days or other such activities?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you attend school administration meetings e.g , school council, parent meetings or any other?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you visit your childs' classroom to observe lessons?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you return requests asking for information or specified materials?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you attend parent/teacher conferences or interview nights?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Does the teacher visit your home for informal visits?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you assist your child with home work?
actual A O ST S N
preferred A O ST S N

Do you go on class excursions?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you make equipment and instructional material for use in the classroom?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you do any typing or duplicating for classroom use?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you volunteer for school canteen, busy bees or any other similar activities?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you file or maintain resource material in the classroom?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you organize interest centers within the classroom e.g., cooking, spinning, rope plaiting or any other?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you hear children read, or work with individual children within the classroom?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you supervise children in the playground during recreation?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you mark childrens' work in the classroom?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you offer ideas and suggestions for change within the learning situation?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you assist in learning activities such as story telling or craft activities?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you attend workshops especially for parents?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Does the teacher help you to better understand the skills being taught to your child?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you get a choice as to the ways you would like to be involved in the classroom?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Does the teacher keep you informed about your child's on-going development?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
If you are a working parent, are there extra-curricular activities at times so you can atend them?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you see that your involvement is beneficial to your child's education?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N

SECTION THREE **Barriers relating to parent involvement.**

a. List the barriers as you see them, that prevent you from participating more in your child's education.

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....

b. What could the school do, to better parent involvement?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for assisting me. If you have further comments please write them at the bottome of this page.

Jill Highett

APPENDIX C

SECTION ONE, TWO AND THREE OF TEACHER SURVEY

Parent involvement in early childhood education survey

The home / school relationship is important to a child's education. This study seeks to know the extent to which parents are presently involved in their child's education, how much involvement they would prefer and what the barriers are related to parental involvement.

The survey is divided into three sections.

Section one	General information
Section two	Actual and preferred involvement of parents as perceived by teachers.
Section three	Barriers relating to parental involvement.

SECTION ONE; General Information.

1. Are you presently a kindergarten, reception or year one teacher? Please circle — K R One

2. For how many full years have you been teaching? .....

3. For how many years have you been involved with either kindergarten reception or year one? Please indicate — K ... R ... One ...

SECTION TWO Actual and preferred involvement

Section two consists of questions relating to actual involvement (1st line) and preferred involvement (2nd line). Reflect on the actual parental involvement that has occurred within your center in the past year, and indicate with a circle how you see it to be.

Indicate how you would prefer this involvement to be on line two.

The Scale:

A: Always	O: Often	ST: Sometimes	S: Seldom	N: Never
Always = 100%	Often = 75%	Sometimes - 50%	Seldom = 25%	Never = Nil

An Example:

Do parents visit your center to observe activities?

actual	A	O	ST	S	N
preferred	A	O	ST	S	N

The circled response on the first line, indicates that the parents in fact seldom visit the center. The circled response from the second line, indicates that you the teacher would prefer the parent to visit the center more often.

If you wish to add comments, please use the space provided at the end of the survey.

There can be many ways in which parents can be involved in their child's education. For each of the following please indicate how you as a kindergarten teacher, perceive their interaction.

Do parents respond to newsletters and notices?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they help raise funds e.g , street stalls raffles walk-a-thons?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they attend kindergarten activities such as fathers night, pooled luncheons?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they attend kindergarten meetings such as parent auxilliary, management meetings?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they visit your center to observe activities?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they return your requests asking for information or specified materials?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they attend parent/teacher conferences, or interview nights?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you arrange informal home visits?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do parents assist children with skills such as learning to write, read and count?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N

Do they make equipment or aides for you to use in your center?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they type or duplicate materials for the kindergarten?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they volunteer for kindergarten shop or busy bees or similar activities?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they maintain resource material?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they set up interest centers e.g , spinning cooking, shearing or similar activities?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do parents work with children in your center on a one to one basis?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do parents assist you in play-ground supervision?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do parents correct childrens' work at your center?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do parents offer ideas and suggestions for change within the classroom situation?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do parents go on interest trips e.g , beach, zoo, farms or others?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do they help you in learning activities such as story telling or craft activities?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you organize work-shops especially for parents?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you help parents to better understand the skills being taught to the children?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you give parents a choice in the ways they would like to be involved?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you keep parents informed about their child's on-going development?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you plan extra-curricular activities at times when working parents can attend?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N
Do you believe that it is important for both parents and children to understand that having parents involved is beneficial to the childs' education?	actual	A	O	ST	S	N
	preferred	A	O	ST	S	N

SECTION THREE Barriers relating to parent involvement.

a) List the barriers as you see them, that prevent the parents of the children in your center from participating more in the child's early education.

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....

b) What could the kindergarten do to better parent involvement ?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for assisting me. If you have other comments, please write them on the back of this page.

Jill Highett.

APPENDIX D

CORRESPONDENCE

#008 10819 47 Ave.,
Edmonton T6H 5J1
Alberta CANADA
24-3-87

Principal,
..... Primary School,
.....
SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Dear .....

Remember me? I am Jill Highett, and I was Director of the Kadina Pre-School, prior to taking leave for the purpose of further study. I am currently enjoying the motivation and freedom of being a student in the Masters program of Educational Administration at the University of Alberta, Canada.

My initial contact with you and your school,is to set up an arrangement to enable me to collect relevant data relating to my thesis. For my thesis proposal, I have chosen a topic that is of great interest to me, and as a result of my research, it will also be beneficial to the concept of parent teacher interaction with regard to early childhood education. My intention is to investigate 'Actual and Preferred Parent Involvement in a childs' schooling, (Kindergarten to Year one) as perceived by parents and teachers.'

If you as Principal, are in agreeance with my intrusion, I would like to implement your school, as one of my resources. My study is being conducted in an effort to help identify some of the possibilities of involving parents in kindergarten and school programs.

To initiate my research and to make this study meaningful, I would appreciate the following information

1. Number of students enrolled in your program.

2. Number of full time equivalent teaching staff.

3. Enrolment of school.

As a follow-up to this information, I will send two questionnaires. One will be for the Reception and Year One teachers to complete. The other will be for the parents of the children in these two grades to complete. A closing date will be given, whereby these questionnaires in a sealed envelope, will be returned to the school. I will arrange a person to collect them on the given day, and forward them on to me.

It is important that I receive a prompt reply, as to whether you are willing for your teachers and parents to be part of my research. Once this has been confirmed, I can then proceed with the second stage, namely the questionnaires. I stress that complete anonymity and ethical conduct is assured with regard to the teachers and parents participating.

Thanking you in anticipation, and take care. Regards to the staff that remember me!

Jill.

July1987

Your assistance is requested in completing the enclosed questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire will be used to ascertain how parents and teachers perceive parental involvement in kindergarten/school programs.

Would you please, to ensure anonymity of response, complete the questionnaire, seal it in the enclosed envelope and return the envelope to your kindergarten or school. All the questionnaires will be collected on a given date and sent to me here in Canada. The data will then be summarized and no person, class or school will be identified in the final report. The data you have provided, will be processed for the research component of my Masters Degree in Education, at the University of Alberta, Canada. A summary of the major findings will be provided to the schools and kindergartens that have been involved in the research.

Thank you,
Yours faithfully,

Jill Highett.